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ANNIE S. SWAN

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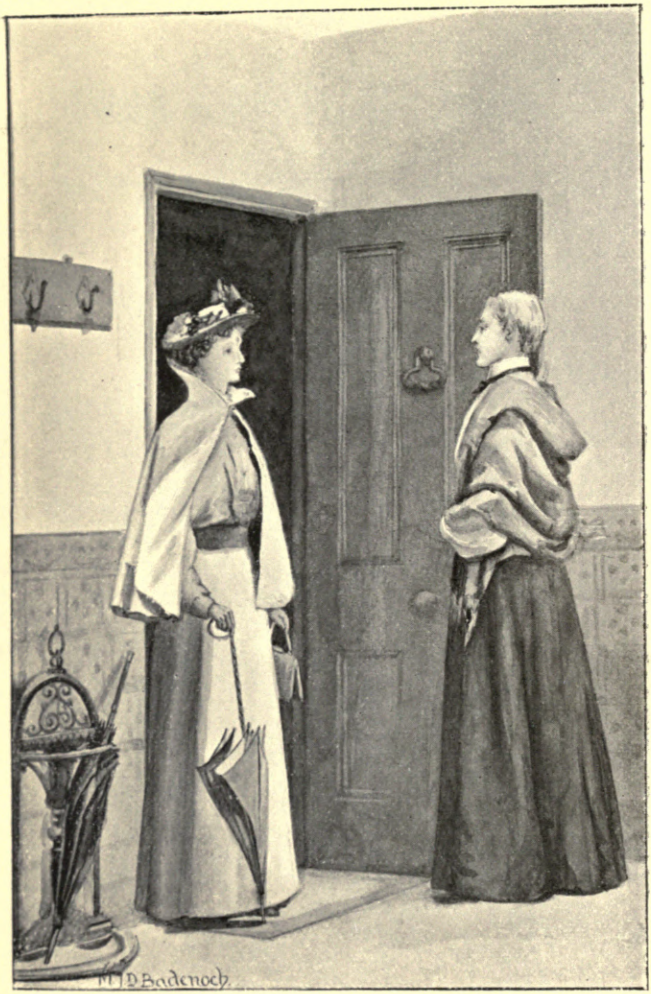

"Miss Wyndham!" she exclaimed, in great astonishment, "What can you possibly want here at this hour?" [*Page* 171.

Frontispiece]

Wyndham's Daughter

A Story of To-Day

BY

ANNIE S. SWAN

LONDON
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1898

Dedicated

TO

Those among my young sisters who are discontented
with their lot, in the hope that the true record
of Joyce Wyndham's experience may help
them to take up with cheerfulness
the duty which lies nearest.

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WYNDHAM'S DAUGHTER.

CHAPTER I.

HANNAH THRALE'S INVITATION.

THEY had an aristocratic name, but they were not aristocratic, nor did they number any members of the aristocracy among their acquaintance. They were, indeed, suburban and commonplace in every condition and relation of their lives. They rejoiced in that fact, and were entirely contented with their lot. Alfred Wyndham & Co., Linen Drapers, Newington Causeway, was their business title and designation. The Co. was in reality Mrs. Wyndham, who had brought some considerable capital to the firm. She was herself a tradesman's daughter, and had married Alfred Wyndham somewhat late in life. She had promised her mother on her death-bed never to marry while her father lived, but it was no particular hardship for the young

couple to wait, because they were both prudent and cautious by nature, and had no desire to marry until they could have a thoroughly comfortable and substantial home. At her father's death Mrs. Wyndham found herself in the possession of a modest fortune, and when at the end of twelve months she became the wife of the man to whom she had been so long engaged, she unquestioningly placed her money in his hands for business purposes. Nor had she ever had the slightest cause to regret it. During his period of waiting, Alfred Wyndham bought as an investment one of the roomy and pleasant family houses in the older part of Denmark Hill, and furnished it gradually, so that when he brought his wife to it, it was a most comfortable and substantial home. It stood within its own grounds, which, however, were not very extensive, though it rejoiced in the somewhat pretentious name of Overton Hall. In this house two children were born to them, a son and a daughter. Tom was the elder of the two, a healthy, rollicking, commonplace boy, neither conspicuously clever nor deplorably dull. His chief interest, perhaps, was centred in every form of outdoor sports, and when the day came for him to enter his father's business, he did so without demur, although he regarded it as rather a bore, chiefly

because it somewhat curtailed his opportunities for playing cricket and football and kindred games. He and his father, however, were on very good terms, and thoroughly understood each other. Very often Alfred Wyndham would say complacently to his wife, "Oh, we'll manage to make a very good business man out of Tom yet."

Strange that through their younger child should arise the great, indeed the only sorrow of that quiet couple's uneventful life. She had always been an odd child, and a source of some considerable anxiety to her mother; in her earlier years she had not been strong, for which reason she had been a good deal indulged, and had also been kept at home from school more than is common or desirable. Her education, however, did not much suffer; she was a dreamy and thoughtful child, never happier than when sitting under one of the spreading trees in the old-fashioned garden reading a favourite book, or dreaming the idle hours away. Her idleness was, indeed, a great source of worry to her busy, bustling, energetic mother; she wanted Joyce to be an accomplished and well-educated girl, of course, but her chief desire was to rear her to be a useful, capable woman, with a comprehensive knowledge of every branch of woman's special work, and this was the trouble. Joyce

would not take the slightest interest in household things of any kind, abhorred sewing and knitting and fancy work of every description, and there was a certain quiet setting aside of her mother's expressed desires on these particular points which sometimes made Mrs. Wyndham feel rather small, and occasioned her a good deal of private anxiety about the future, for if at sixteen Joyce could quietly ignore and defy her, what was likely to be the state of affairs at one-and-twenty? In Joyce, however, her father saw no fault; he was passionately fond of her, and she of him. He never worried or teased her to do dull or uninteresting things, and she was correspondingly grateful to him with a kind of selfish gratitude, although she would indignantly have resented the idea of being called selfish.

Mothers are sometimes at a disadvantage with their growing daughters, and they are apt to get out of sympathy with one another at certain stages of their mutual life. Mrs. Wyndham often felt herself out of sympathy with Joyce, and had many a little heartache, of which, however, she could not speak even to her husband.

One sunny June afternoon, Joyce Wyndham was sitting under her favourite tree in her father's garden. It had been a very hot day, but into

that pleasant shade the sun's rays scarcely penetrated. Joyce looked cool enough in her dainty zephyr dress and a white sailor hat, broad enough in the brim to shade her eyes. There was nothing very conspicuous or striking in the girl's appearance; she was slim and tall for her years, which were nineteen. Her face, however, was marked by a certain strength of outline and gravity of expression which might well have belonged to a woman twice her age. It was a strong, clever face, and one which might be handsome in later years. It could not be called so now; she had no colour, and the blackness of her hair and eyes seemed to show up the sallowness of her skin. She seemed intensely interested in her book; never once for an hour and more had she raised her eyes, nor moved, except to turn each page, eager to see the next. So absorbed was she that she did not hear the side gate open and close, nor the light footfall of the intruder upon the turf. A long shadow caused by the approaching figure fell across the page, and she looked up with a start.

"Oh, Hannah, is it you?" she exclaimed. "I didn't expect you this afternoon. What has brought you?"

"I wanted to see you rather particularly. How cool and nice it is in here. Oh, it is hot on that

Camberwell Road. I was nearly baked as I came up."

"I suppose it is hot. I haven't been much out to-day," answered Joyce. "Sit down, or would you like to come into the house and have some tea first? I believe it will be ready now. It is after four, isn't it?"

"Yes. I don't want any tea just now, thank you. I want to ask you whether you think you could come to a meeting in our house to-night?"

Joyce laid down her book, and her face flushed slightly with her eager interest.

"Oh, I should love to come, but I don't know whether mother will let me. Perhaps she might if you asked her."

Hannah Thrale shook her head.

"Mrs. Wyndham doesn't like me, Joyce, and you know it quite well. She would be much more likely to refuse if I were to ask her, but I do wish you would come. You will know how interesting it is going to be when I tell you who is coming."

She ran over a few names then, some of which were familiar to Joyce, others strange.

"It would be just the chance that you have been wanting so long, to hear all the aims and objects of our society fully explained, by such leaders, too," she said in conclusion. "Can't you just

come? It seems ridiculous to look at a great tall woman like you, and to think that you can hardly go outside your father's gate without asking permission."

The distinct note of scorn in her friend's voice caused the colour to deepen in Joyce's face. It was the great grievance of her life that she was not allowed a tithe of the freedom of action Hannah Thrale enjoyed, and it hurt her pride to hear the case stated in such plain language. Hannah Thrale, however, was three years older than her friend, and looked even more. She was rather a striking-looking young woman, tall and generously built, with that clear, milk-white complexion which often accompanies auburn hair. She wore her hair, which was really beautiful, in the Greek style, and it became her well. Her dress was also out of the common or conventional order; it consisted that day of a sage-coloured cashmere made in the Empire fashion, and a big hat with nodding plumes which gave her a sort of picturesqueness, which was, indeed, the effect she most sought after. She was very fond of Joyce Wyndham. They had met at the school in the neighbourhood which Joyce had attended from her childhood, and where Hannah Thrale had been first a pupil, then a teacher, but for a reason which will become apparent afterwards,

she had been lately dismissed from her employment.

"The meeting is at eight," she said presently. "Couldn't you just say that you are coming down to spend an hour at our house? You can tell your mother afterwards about the meeting if you think fit, but you won't hear anything there to poison or contaminate you. I could assure her on that point."

"I wish you would come in, then, and tell her about it, Hannah; it is the only way. I don't think that she'll let me go only for my asking."

"Well, I will ask her by-and-by," said Hannah good-naturedly. "What are you reading? Oh, 'Joshua Davidson.' Fine book, isn't it?"

"Grand," said Joyce enthusiastically; "but do you know mother picked it up last night, and read a chapter out of it. You know how people do, picking a bit sometimes out of a book, and allowing it to bias their whole judgment. She said it was not fit for me to read, and that she would tell you so the first time she saw you. I only got leave to finish it by begging father to let me read it."

"And what did he say about it?"

"Father is different from mother about most things," said Joyce; "he says that I am to read

what I like, and that when I get older I shall be able to discriminate."

"Which shows Mr. Wyndham to be a very wise man," observed Miss Thrale, with a patronising little inflection in her voice which would have highly amused Mr. Wyndham could he have overheard it.

"Do you know what I have been thinking once or twice, Joyce?" she added presently. "Perhaps you would be happier if you were left alone here, and could content yourself with your environment. You see you are such an indulged and idolised daughter, that there is no chance of your doing anything with which your parents will not concern themselves. You know, of course, in what estimation I hold them; they are delightful and estimable people, but you see they do not understand. They have not awakened to the needs of humanity; they do not hear the bitter cry which rises from the great mass of struggling and oppressed humanity; they are like thousands, hundreds of thousands, of other good and worthy people in this city, hedged in by the impenetrable wall of their own respectability."

Joyce listened to these words as she listened to most words which fell from Hannah Thrale's lips, as if they were Gospel truth, as indeed they were

to her. She was very young and full of enthusiasms, and at the most impressionable age she had come in contact with this strong, original, and unconventional nature, which was presently imbued with wild ideals and impossible schemes for the regeneration of the world.

CHAPTER II.

MRS. WYNDHAM INTERFERES.

MRS. WYNDHAM was nodding in a chintz-covered easy-chair at the French window of the drawing-room, which opened out upon the lawn. She was disturbed by the entrance of the housemaid, who came to inquire whether she should bring the tea-tray to the drawing-room, or take it into the garden.

"Miss Thrale is beside Miss Joyce, ma'am," she said, glancing through the open window. "There is a good deal of wind out. Perhaps you would like it better here."

"Yes, I think we had better stay indoors," answered Mrs. Wyndham, and while the girl brought out the little tea-table, she got up from her chair and glanced across to the garden seat where the two girls were sitting in earnest conversation. Mrs. Wyndham was a tall and rather handsome person, inclined to stoutness. She had a fresh-coloured, youthful-looking face for her years, and her general appearance may

be described in the one word, motherly. She was always very well dressed; black silk of fine soft make was her favourite material, and her caps and any other lace adornment she happened to wear were always costly and in good taste. She was a woman absolutely without pretensions of any kind, entirely contented with her lot, and aiming at nothing but making her home comfortable and happy for those she loved. This she succeeded in doing; her husband and her son adored her. It was only Joyce who felt her gentle rule in the slightest degree irksome. Her kind eyes were troubled as they rested on the two girls; she did not much approve the intimacy between them. Perhaps one little weakness of Mrs. Wyndham's was a strict regard for conventionality, and there was something so decidedly Bohemian and queer about the Thrales, that she would much have preferred no acquaintance with them. She did not altogether dislike Hannah; there was indeed something oddly winning and lovable about the girl, and her beauty was such as must attract attention everywhere. One of her greatest charms was that she was entirely unconscious of it, and though she had a great many admirers, remained quite unspoilt.

Mrs. Wyndham opened the sunshade which had been left conveniently near the open window, and

Good afternoon, Mrs. Wyndham. [*Page* 19.

sauntered across the lawn, observing Joyce give a slight start as she caught sight of her. Hannah Thrale had a genuine liking for Mrs. Wyndham, although she often deplored her lack of interest in the great social questions upon which she brooded and pondered night and day, and she came forward with an eager, frank smile to greet her.

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Wyndham. How fresh and cool and delightful you all look in here. I have just been telling Joyce that to walk up Camberwell Road this afternoon is not a particularly delightful experience."

"The sun is very hot. Why don't you sit down, my dear?" said Mrs. Wyndham kindly.

It was impossible for her to be distant or abrupt in her manner to anyone; she was the soul of kindliness, and there was something about Hannah Thrale's unattached condition that appealed to her, and she often felt that she would like to stretch a helping, motherly hand to her since she had no mother of her own.

"I have come to beg a favour, Mrs. Wyndham, and I hope you will grant it. There is a meeting at our house to-night, and I want you to let Joyce come to it. She wants awfully to come herself; you can see that; do let her."

Mrs. Wyndham's kind face perceptibly hardened.

"What sort of a meeting is it, Hannah?" she asked, a little coldly.

"Well, it is a meeting to consider abuses and things," answered Hannah, a little vaguely. "I cannot very well tell you exactly what business will be done. It is a preliminary meeting of a social brotherhood; it will be quite interesting. Do let her come."

"I should like to know what kind of people are to be there, my dear," said Mrs. Wyndham doubtfully; "and I must say I do not particularly see what a young girl like Joyce can find interesting in such a meeting."

"Now, isn't that rather selfish, dear Mrs. Wyndham?" said Hannah, with her most winning smile. "You are so comfortable and so well off in this lovely old place that you sometimes forget that there are a great many people outside your gates who are not comfortable or well off at all. You would not like Joyce to grow up into a selfish woman, would you, without any interest or sympathy for the sorrows of others?"

"No, I should not like that, certainly," Mrs. Wyndham admitted; "but I do not think there is any danger of it. We have many opportunities and channels for doing charitable and kind acts, Hannah. In our own church and parish, for instance, we have a great many poor, far more than we could ever reach."

"Believe me, dear Mrs. Wyndham, the real sufferers do not go to churches; they are beyond the reach of church aid," said Hannah earnestly. "I wish you would come to the meeting. Won't you come?"

Mrs. Wyndham turned to Joyce, who was listening with a very eager look in her eyes.

"Joyce, dear, just go in, will you, and tell Ada that I have changed my mind, and that we shall have tea out here, if she does not mind the trouble?"

Now, though Joyce had been trained to obedience, she felt inclined to rebel at that moment, for she knew very well that she had been sent out of sight and hearing, and she particularly wanted to listen to the discussion between her mother and Hannah. However, there was no excuse for declining, and she rose rather reluctantly and walked towards the house.

"Now, my dear," said Mrs. Wyndham, turning at once to the girl who sat opposite to her, "I am going to be very frank with you. I do not at all approve of Joyce going to such gatherings as you speak of, and I don't want her to be mixed up with the kind of people who go to them. I hope you will excuse me for speaking so very frankly, but her father does not like it either, and it would be a real kindness to us if you would leave her alone."

Hannah Thrale did not resent this plain speech, only her face became a little sad.

"I am sorry to hear you speak like that, Mrs. Wyndham, and, I do assure you, you speak without knowledge. If only you would come to the meeting."

"Well, then, I will come," said Mrs. Wyndham suddenly. "Perhaps I am too much prejudiced. I shall be very happy indeed if I find that I am; but I cannot think that it is good for a young girl like Joyce to be perpetually dwelling upon the subjects which are treated of in that extraordinary book you lent her, and which I see she has been reading this afternoon. I am obliged to speak very plainly. You see Joyce is my only daughter, and she is a girl who requires to be very carefully dealt with. She gets completely carried away, and I don't want her to make shipwreck of her life."

"She is the stuff that leaders and reformers are made of, Mrs. Wyndham," said Hannah enthusiastically. "That is the sort of woman we want to help on the new crusade. I have the greatest possible hopes of Joyce; she is so very clever and so enthusiastic. It is enthusiasm above everything else we want in these prosaic days; apathy is the curse of the times."

"Hush, child; you use words, and I do not think you know exactly what they mean," exclaimed Mrs. Wyndham, a trifle sharply. She did not like to hear

such words fall from the girl's lips, and yet she was greatly impressed by some hidden power she possessed. Conscious of the girl's strong personal influence, she feared her power over Joyce. "I do wish that Joyce were more like other girls," she said, with a quick sigh. "She has everything in this world to make her happy; her father and her brother simply dote upon her, and would give her anything in reason, and yet she is not content. She is always sighing after something which she has not got. I cannot understand this restless discontent which seems to be unsettling so many young girls at present. When I was Joyce's age, I thought of nothing but pretty frocks and the next dance I should be invited to."

"Quite so," said Hannah Thrale, with a little daring inflection in her voice; "that is just the difference, you see, between Joyce and the ordinary girl. Pretty frocks and dances have no interest for her, as they have none for me, and I am so glad. Dear Mrs. Wyndham, you ought to rejoice that Joyce is so far above such trivialities. She will do a great work in the world yet."

Mrs. Wyndham shook her head.

"I should prefer to leave the great work to others. Joyce is not strong, nor has she sufficient strength of mind to keep within bounds. As I said before, she

is apt to be completely carried away. Here she comes again. Well, I will come to the meeting to-night; then perhaps I shall be able to decide whether I must forbid the friendship between you."

Hannah Thrale's fine eyes suddenly filled with tears, and the sight was very disturbing to Mrs. Wyndham. But she was now very seriously concerned about her child, and felt that some prompt measures were necessary.

The housemaid followed Joyce with the tea-table, and the talk drifted for a moment to more commonplace things. Presently the garden gate was opened with a hasty hand, and Tom Wyndham made his appearance. Then his mother remembered that he had come home to dress for a cricket match at Streatham Common. She did not observe, fortunately, perhaps, for her peace of mind, how the light leapt in his honest grey eyes as he recognised his mother's guest. But though he had very few minutes to spare, he came striding across the lawn with a very bright smile on his pleasant face. He was a tall, well-built, handsome fellow, immaculately attired in the orthodox frock coat and silk hat. Tom was indeed a bit of a dandy in his way, affecting always the newest things in summer vests and neckties. Sometimes his father would make a good-humoured protest against the many changes of attire

which Tom seemed to think necessary; but Tom would only laugh and say, "Be thankful, dad, that I take my dissipation in neckties, and nothing stronger. Besides, look what an advertisement I am."

There was the best of good understandings between father and son, and Alfred Wyndham often thanked God in his soul for the honest, good-natured, healthy-minded lad who had never caused him, since his birth, a moment's anxiety.

"Jolly hot this afternoon, isn't it, Miss Thrale?" he said, as he shook hands. "No, mother, I must not stop for tea, though I should like to awfully. Do you know if my things are laid out?"

"Yes, I laid them out myself, my dear," said his mother, looking up with a fond smile. "I cannot think how you can play cricket in this frightful weather, and there is no shade on the Common."

"There never is any shade on a cricket field, is there, mother?" inquired Tom, with a teasing smile. "Joyce, you look as if you had been reading the latest thing in ghosts. Why can't you make my little sister perk up a bit, Miss Thrale? She is always so gloomy; it is like a perpetual rainy day to be beside her. I have to provide the sunshine, although we always read in books that it is the province of the daughters to provide that element."

"Don't be silly, Tom," said Joyce, rather sharply.

He was always teasing her, and she had very little patience with his chaff, perhaps because she often felt that it contained a good deal of truth.

"Well, I am off. Why don't you and Miss Thrale come up and see the match? I'll drive you, if you like."

"Hannah does not care for cricket matches, Tom," said Joyce, with a note of scorn in her voice.

"Oh yes, I do," put in Hannah promptly; "and I should like it very much. May we really come? Are you in earnest, Mr. Tom?"

"Yes, of course he is," said Mrs. Wyndham. "Run in, Joyce, and get your hat on. If she would take a little more interest in such things, I should be better pleased."

"Oh, I like a good cricket match," said Hannah brightly, "and am only deterred from joining the lady cricketers myself by considerations of economy."

She flashed a little mischievous glance at Tom's pleasant face, and, listening to their pleasant banter, the shadow died out of Mrs. Wyndham's eyes. It never occurred to her that her boy might be specially interested in Hannah Thrale. Joyce was her chief and great concern, and though she believed and expected that her son would, in the ordinary course of things, fall in love and marry one day, she had not the slightest fear or doubt that his choice would not

be one of which she would entirely approve, for, as I said, Tom Wyndham had never caused his father or mother the slightest anxiety since the day of his birth.

CHAPTER III.

A SOCIALIST MEETING.

THE Thrales lived at the lower end of Camberwell Road, in a small house above a newspaper shop. The family was very small; it consisted, indeed, only of Hannah and her father. One small maid-servant did the work of the household, and it was well done, too, for Hannah, in spite of her peculiarities, had a woman's love for a clean and tidy house, and liked things dainty about her. The place, though poorly furnished, had something superior about it, and even an air of distinction which one would not have expected to find in a little flat above a newspaper shop. It was not the poverty nor the lack of social distinction about the Thrales which troubled Mrs. Wyndham; she was indeed singularly free from that ordinary and very prevalent form of pride which despises people of small means who live in small houses.

The Thrales were of good family, although they belonged to an obscure branch of it, and had very

small acquaintance with its more flourishing scions. Osborne Thrale's relatives had, indeed, washed their hands of him for some considerable time. Rich relations will sometimes forgive you for being poor; but to be at once poor and eccentric is an unpardonable sin. Osborne Thrale was both; strictly speaking, he was a person of no occupation. He was literary in his tastes, and did occasional bits of journalistic work for such editors as he had not tired out with his vagaries and general unreliability. He was very clever in his way, but a dabbler in too many questions; and of late years he had allowed himself to be carried away by a mistaken devotion to certain ideas and impossible plans for the revolution and reformation of the world. Those who knew him well loved him, for indeed there was something singularly lovable about the man; but to the majority he was nothing more nor less than a crank. His daughter was very like him in appearance, and shared his ideas up to a certain point. They were an interesting pair to those who cared to study them, and their influence in the very Bohemian circles in which they moved was great. Osborne Thrale's long fight with fate, and general lack of success in life, had naturally disposed him towards the society of those who were generally dissatisfied with the existing condition of things; but while he associated with the more extreme

Socialists because he believed their main principle to be right, he was far from being drawn to them personally, and had been disappointed many times by the spirit of sordid self-seeking which sometimes revealed itself, even in those whom he had imagined most devoted to the cause. He was himself singularly unselfish, and possessed in a very high degree that rare quality—devotion to a cause, entirely free from every personal consideration.

Mrs. Wyndham had never seen Hannah Thrale's father, although she had often heard of him, and sometimes felt that perhaps, if she could see him, she would better understand the girl. After dinner that night she dressed herself quietly, and quite disregarding Joyce's somewhat wistful look, set out alone on her walk to the place of meeting. It was not an errand in which she took particular pleasure; she set out upon it, indeed, from a sense of duty. She was a very just person, and she felt that before condemning or forbidding the friendship between the two girls she ought to satisfy herself that it could do no possible harm. Joyce had often pointed out the house to her, and when she climbed the stairs and knocked at the door she was at once admitted. Just as she stepped into the little hall, Hannah appeared at another door, and bade her a pleasant good evening.

"I am so glad you have come; the meeting is just

assembling. Perhaps you had better come into my room and take off your cloak; it will get very hot by and by, especially if we are crowded, as we sometimes are."

Mrs. Wyndham nodded, and followed the girl into Hannah's own little bedroom, where everything was dainty and neat enough to satisfy even Mrs. Wyndham's critical and fastidious eye.

"I won't take off my bonnet, thank you. I just want to slip in at the back, where I shall not be seen," she said, as she unfastened her mantle. "Do you have many ladies at your meetings?"

"A few, not many," said Hannah with a curious little twist of her lips.

She was looking lovely. Mrs. Wyndham could scarcely refrain, indeed, from remarking upon it. She still wore the gown in which she had appeared earlier in the day, but when her hat was removed her beautiful face was seen to advantage. She had an exquisitely shaped head, and her features were purely classical. Mrs. Wyndham felt a rush of anxious pity in her motherly heart as she looked upon this girl dowered so richly, and who was placed, as she considered, in such a very trying and even dangerous position.

"Joyce was exceedingly anxious to come with me

to the meeting to-night, my dear, but I did not allow her. You understand, don't you?"

A little smile curved Hannah's perfect lips.

"Oh, yes, I understand quite well, dear Mrs. Wyndham; but I assure you it is not a den of lions, and I quite expect that if you are not converted, you will at least modify your opinion of us. I am in great hopes that after to-night you will remove every objection from Joyce's path."

"I shall be very glad if that is the result of the meeting, my dear," said Mrs. Wyndham quite heartily, because there was something more winning than usual in the girl's look and manner. "Now I wish you would tell me what I might expect to hear. What do you have meetings for? I have often heard about them, chiefly from our vicar, Mr. Meynell, but I do not think I am at all clear about it."

Hannah made a little grimace.

"I am quite sure there is no hope of your being clear on the matter if it has been explained to you by Mr. Meynell. To begin with, he does not know anything about it, and if he did he would misrepresent it as like as not. A society such as ours never gets justice from the clergy. That is one of my indictments against the Church, that it will never identify itself with any new movement which really represents the voice and wish of the people, but is always for

sticking in the old grooves. That is why it is losing its power so rapidly; it won't march with the times, so the times leave it behind."

"But, my dear Hannah," said Mrs. Wyndham, much shocked, for she was an ardent Churchwoman, and had an unassailable belief in the Church's work and power, "you make a very sweeping assertion. I am sure you cannot bring such a charge against our church or our vicar. I am sure there is no parish in London where there is so much good and fruitful work done as in our own parish."

"Oh, well, it depends on what you call fruitful work," said Hannah, with a little shrug. "But I am afraid I must go. Father likes me to receive the people as they come in. Would you like to remain here until we are just about to begin? then I will come and fetch you, and you can slip in just at the door, and if there should be anything objectionable said," she added, with a little twinkling in her eye, "you can slip out, you know, and nobody will be any the wiser." So saying, she slipped away, closing the door behind her.

Mrs. Wyndham was left alone for about ten minutes, during which time she could hear the constant hum and bustle of arrival at the door. It was about half-past eight before Hannah came to the door again and beckoned her.

"Now we are just about to begin. We shall have one lady to speak to-night, and I think I am rather sorry she is here. Her name is Mrs. Olivia Hemming, a very good, true woman, and devoted to the cause, but just a little—what shall I call it?—perhaps a little too emancipated would be the word. But one thing I can promise you, and that is that she will interest you."

Mrs. Wyndham was conscious of a distinct feeling of excitement almost amounting to nervousness as she followed Hannah across the little hall and into the room where the meeting was to be held. It was a double room with folding doors between, which of course were thrown open, and all the furniture having been taken out and seats set across the floor, it presented quite the appearance of a little hall. A small platform was erected before the fireplace, with a table and an armchair, in which sat Osborne Thrale. He always took the chair at the meetings in his own house. He was reading some report carried over from the last meeting, and Mrs. Wyndham had thus time to study him, which she did most attentively. He was a fine, even a noble-looking man, with a face which might have belonged to one of the prophets of old; he had a singularly persuasive and eloquent voice, although he never raised it beyond the speaking tone. He wore his very shabby

brown velveteen coat with a dignity and grace which Mrs. Wyndham had never seen surpassed. To say that she was surprised but feebly describes her state of mind, for she saw that Osborne Thrale was not only a gentleman, but a personality far above the common.

Before the reading of the report was finished, she had ample time to observe the other occupants of the room. About thirty persons were present, and Mrs. Wyndham was most unfavourably impressed by the majority. They were, of course, mainly men, most of them young, and while there were one or two striking faces among them, it was neither a distinguished nor a particularly attractive gathering. Mrs. Olivia Hemming, who sat on Hannah Thrale's right hand, was a large, heavy woman, who wore a strange costume suggestive of man's attire. Her grey hair was cut short, and her whole appearance was extraordinary and unattractive to a degree; but there was plenty of strength of mind and will in her face, and Mrs. Wyndham was quite prepared for an eloquent and powerful speech. No one paid the slightest attention to her; Hannah had provided a comfortable chair for her behind the door, from which she had a good view of the whole proceedings, being herself quite unobserved, except, perhaps, by the speakers who faced her.

Mrs. Wyndham was never able afterwards to give a very clear account of what took place that night; she listened very attentively, but it was some considerable time before she could follow the drift of Osborne Thrale's remarks. The general tone of them seemed to indicate a very large dissatisfaction with everything. A great many questions were touched upon, both economic and social, and there were frequent allusions to capital and labour and to the legislative system, which Mrs. Wyndham had some difficulty in following, for she read the newspapers after the desultory fashion of her class, and had a very scanty knowledge or comprehension of the great questions of the day. Her husband was a Radical in politics; she herself was Conservative to the last degree in every action and relation of her life, though she would have fiercely resented such an imputation.

After Osborne Thrale sat down, a young man stepped up from the front seat, and, turning his face to the company, began to talk in a very eloquent and impassioned style. Mrs. Wyndham was much interested in his appearance. He was quite young, not more than three or four and twenty; he had an anxious, earnest face, which belonged to a sufferer and a thinker. He wore his hair somewhat long, and his turned-down collar and loosely-knotted

necktie had a character of their own. He seemed to be dealing chiefly with the question upon which Osborne Thrale had merely touched—the wrongs which the capitalist has heaped upon the labourer; and though his remarks were received with evident satisfaction by the majority of his hearers, Mrs. Wyndham was conscious of a slow feeling of indignation and anger rising in her mind as she listened. She felt herself a representative of the maligned capitalists. Her husband was a rich man, and employed large numbers of people, and she would have dared anybody to say that he treated them unjustly or hardly, or that he had no right to the money which he had honestly earned. When this young man finished his indictment against the capitalists with an impassioned appeal to those present to help on the cause which sought the more equal adjustment of things, Mrs. Olivia Hemming was briefly introduced by Mr. Osborne Thrale.

There was a very amused little smile on Hannah's lips when this lady stood up, and the very spirit of mischief seemed to dance in her eyes, for she knew that even at her mildest Mrs. Olivia Hemming was bound to shock Mrs. Wyndham. The presence of Joyce's mother, indeed, gave to that meeting a peculiar zest which was often lacking at the others. In spite of her impassioned pleading with Mrs.

Wyndham, Hannah was not so loyal as some would have wished her to be, and had no hesitation in calmly stating her opinion that the meetings did little good, and were seldom lifted above the commonplace.

CHAPTER IV.

MRS. WYNDHAM'S IMPRESSIONS OF THE MEETING.

TOM WYNDHAM took his sister to a cricket concert that night, and his father was left to smoke his pipe alone, which was rather a rare occurrence. The Wyndhams were by no means a stay-at-home couple; they took a good deal of quiet amusement, but always together, and it was very seldom indeed that Mrs. Wyndham went out alone. After dinner he thought a good deal about it, as he dawdled over the evening paper, and the idea of his wife attending a socialistic meeting amused him a good deal in a quiet way. She had a very hazy idea of what socialism meant, and he wondered once or twice whether it was likely that she would come back enlightened. When a younger man he had attended one or two such meetings himself, and his recollection of them rather inclined him to believe that she would probably come back more at sea than ever. About ten o'clock Ada entered the dining-room as usual, and set out the biscuit jar, a decanter, and a couple of glasses.

Alfred Wyndham was a very abstemious man, but he occasionally permitted himself a modest glass of whisky before going to bed, if he had had a tiring day.

"Did your mistress say anything about when she would be likely to come back, Ada?" he asked, looking over the paper.

"No, sir; she did not say anything," was the reply.

"Oh well, I think I had better go down and meet her. I should not think it likely she would take a cab from Camberwell Road, should you?"

"I shouldn't think so, sir; it is such a little way," she answered. "But if you would like me to go down and fetch her I can do it."

"Oh no, if she does not come in in a few minutes I'll take a turn down the road myself, thank you," and almost before the words were out of his mouth the bell rang at the outer door, and presently his wife entered, not in her usual leisurely fashion, however; she seemed a good deal agitated and upset, and he observed that her face was flushed beyond its usual, and her eyes ominously bright.

"Well, my dear, how did you fare?" he asked, looking round with interest.

Mrs. Wyndham sank into the nearest chair, and, untying her bonnet strings, began to fan herself vigorously with the gloves she held in her hand.

"Oh, Alfred, such a meeting! I am so glad I went, because now I know what sort of people these are, and I shall absolutely forbid all intimacy between Joyce and Hannah Thrale after this."

"What, is it so bad as that?" inquired Wyndham, and his wife detected in his voice a slight accent of amusement which she resented very much. He was always foolishly indulgent, she thought, towards Joyce, and she knew that he had a very warm liking for Hannah Thrale; but all the same her mind was firmly made up as to the course she would pursue. "Don't excite yourself, mamma," he said, in his quiet, kindly way. "Won't you take something before you tell me all about it?"

"No, I don't want anything, thank you; I am dreadfully upset. I came away in the middle of a speech, a woman speaking, Alfred, about goodness knows what. It makes me quite ashamed even to talk of it to you."

"Dear me, it must have been rather bad. Tell me about the meeting from the beginning. Were there many people there?"

"About forty, I should think; the room was quite full. Hannah's father was in the chair," she began breathlessly. "Really, he is a fine old gentleman, Alfred, and looks like a duke, or a king, or something. If it were only Hannah and her father, I don't think

I should mind; but the rest—and the sort of things they try to teach! Why, if they had their way everything would be turned upside down, and we should have no homes, or husbands, or children, or anything."

"Dear me, that is very extraordinary," said Alfred, more amused still, but trying to hide it, for he observed that his wife was very much in earnest, and also considerably excited.

"Well, I will tell you all about it from the very beginning, Alfred," she said, trying to calm herself. "When I went, Hannah received me very nicely, and took me into her own room to wait until all the company should have arrived, and really their house is very clean, and everything quite nice. Even I could not find a fault with it, and there is more in Hannah than one would think. Well, then, after all the people had assembled, she took me into the room. They had the folding doors between the two small sitting-rooms thrown open, and seats arranged, and really it was made quite a nice little hall. I was rather interested in her father's speech; he is a splendid old man, Alfred, and he would be quite interesting to know if he could be got away from all those dreadful people."

"I know him very well by sight, my dear," said Wyndham; "he is a handsome old gentleman. His daughter is very much like him."

"Yes, she is. Well, after he had made his speech

a young man got up—Philip Dane, Hannah told me his name was—a long-haired fellow, not so bad-looking, something like an artist or a poet, or a person of that sort, you know, and he spoke a good deal of sound common sense, I thought, mingled with a lot of silly nonsense. To tell the truth, daddy, I could not make much out of it; but so far as I understood him he was chiefly against people accumulating money, and he says that everybody should be equal, that we should all be brothers, and so on; you know the style of thing. You would not approve of that, would you?"

"Oh, well, the theory is all right," said Wyndham, as he lazily refilled his pipe. "I have heard it all before; they were pounding away at the same old doctrines when I was a lad and used to attend their meetings about Soho and Bloomsbury. I do not believe they have made much headway. You see, the unfortunate thing is, it is a theory that won't stand the test of practice, for suppose we were to divide up all our gear with what they are pleased to call our poor brothers and sisters, in a week there would be another call to divide again."

"That is just what I think," cried Mrs. Wyndham triumphantly; "and really, Alfred, I almost felt as if I could have stood up and said something

to him—I really did. But he was very much applauded, and several spoke in support of him, though none so eloquently. That was bad enough, but I do not think I should have minded it so much, but really, when this woman, Mrs. Olivia Hemming, began to speak, it was too terrible. Just think what the subject was, Alfred—I am sure you could never guess if you guessed a hundred years."

"The total abolition of man, perhaps?" said Wyndham, with an amused smile. He had not enjoyed anything so much for a long time. His wife was quite lifted out of her ordinary placid state, and seemed to be greatly upset by what she had heard.

"No, it was not that, something a great deal worse, and I wish you would not laugh, Alfred, because it is a very serious matter. Just think of the risks Joyce has run already through being so intimate with Hannah Thrale, whose nature is bound to be poisoned by the pernicious things which she is always hearing."

"Oh, I do not think that Joyce has taken much harm as yet," said Wyndham carelessly. "Well, come, let us have the head and front of the lady's speech. What was the subject?"

"Well, I could not make out just at first, because she had such a flow of language. Really, she spoke very well, much better than most of the men

present, and that is saying a good deal, because that Philip Dane is a born orator, I should say; but after a while it began to dawn upon me that it was the institution of marriage she was attacking, and she said such dreadful things, Alfred, you cannot think. I feel almost ashamed to tell them to you, and how that old Thrale can let his daughter, a mere girl, sit and listen to such terrible speaking, I cannot think. But there! she has no mother; if she had, such meetings would never be allowed in the house."

"Keep to the point, my love," said Wyndham persuasively. "What did she say about the marriage institution, and if she abolished it, what did she propose to give us in its place?"

"Oh, that I don't know," cried Mrs. Wyndham, with a huge sigh. "I did not wait to hear very much, because I was horrified. I could not sit still, but so far as I could gather it seemed to me that she was advocating a kind of free choice affair, you know—if one does not suit you, then try another. Just think of it, Alfred, and Joyce might have been there to hear."

"It is rather strong, certainly," said Wyndham, "but after all, there is a lot of stuff both talked and written in this world to which nobody pays the slightest heed. How was it received?"

"Oh, they seemed to think it was all right; they applauded her now and again, anyhow; but I felt if I had stopped another minute I should have gone up to her, and said, 'How dare you? You are a wicked woman.'"

"Well, I am glad you left before you took such an extreme step, Letitia," said Wyndham; "and I quite agree with you that it is very bad training for a girl like Hannah Thrale, and perhaps you are right in wishing that she and Joyce were not so intimate."

"I should think I *am* right," said Mrs. Wyndham fervently. "I shall talk very seriously to Joyce to-night, and also to Hannah the first time I see her. In fact I shall make a point of seeing her to-morrow, because I left rather abruptly to-night, without a word of apology to anyone; not that I feel that any apology was due, for really I was too much disgusted to say anything. On one point, however, my mind is quite made up, and that is that the friendship between Joyce and Hannah must come to an end."

"It will be a little rough on Joyce," said Wyndham reflectively. "She is very fond of Hannah, and I must say I do not wonder at it."

"Nor do I," Mrs. Wyndham agreed, readily enough. "I like Hannah myself, but you see as

well as I do, Alfred, that it is positively dangerous for Joyce, with her excitable and headstrong temperament, to be allowed to mix too much with these people. She has not sufficient balance of mind to discriminate between the false and the true, and there is no saying to what length she might go if she was to fall under the influence, for instance, of that frightful Mrs. Hemming."

"Well, it would not do her much good, certainly; still, I think you are needlessly worrying yourself, mother," said Wyndham soothingly. "Joyce is very young; in a year or two she will get a little sense, and will cease to be interested in such things. Wait till she gets a lover or two in her train, and everything will be right. Girls always do have fads of some sort about her age."

"I don't know—I never had," said Mrs. Wyndham gloomily. "I had always too much to do to take up with such silliness."

"Well, can't you give Joyce more to do? It seems to me, Letitia, that she is really very lazy. She does nothing but read, and does not even take such exercise as she ought."

"Oh, I know that; but it is very easy for you to talk, Alfred," said Mrs. Wyndham, quite fretfully for her. "Joyce is extremely difficult to manage, although you think she is so sweet-tempered and

amiable. You do not see her always. Nobody knows what mothers have to put up with with girls of Joyce's age. No man would ever put up with it for a moment."

"Well, you can't be firm enough with her, my dear," observed Wyndham, disposing of the matter in the calm, judicious manner common to his kind. "Just be very firm with her, and gentle as well, and you will mould her as you like."

"Shall I?" asked Mrs. Wyndham. "That is all you know about it, Alfred. I just wish you would take a week at home here with Joyce, and all her little tempers, then we might hear a different story. But there! it is no use grumbling about Joyce; what I want to know is, will you support me in my decision to stop the intimacy between her and Hannah Thrale?"

"Why, yes, of course I will," answered Wyndham; but there was a doubtful tone in his voice, and for the moment his usual peace of mind was troubled, for he foresaw that this might be the beginning of very serious and worrying things in his little domestic world.

CHAPTER V.

PHILIP DANE.

HANNAH THRALE was considerably disturbed when Mrs. Wyndham suddenly rose and fled from the meeting, but she was not at all surprised. She was herself accustomed to the extreme utterances of Mrs. Hemming, and paid but little heed to them. She knew that if she could have the opportunity of a little private talk with Mrs. Wyndham she would be able to explain away the most pronounced part of Mrs. Hemming's speech. She felt sorry that Mrs. Hemming should have had the opportunity of speaking in Mrs. Wyndham's hearing; it was one of the unfortunate things which we deplore, but cannot avert. Hannah knew by instinct that the few remarks which had fallen from Mrs. Hemming's lips had seriously damaged her cause with Mrs. Wyndham, though they were never taken seriously by those who knew the woman. A very bitter experience had soured a kindly nature, and because

her own matrimonial venture had been a miserable failure, she looked upon all questions pertaining to marriage through a distorted vision.

After Mrs. Wyndham's hasty exit, Hannah resigned herself to enjoy the meeting, which she generally managed to do, although she disapproved of a great many of the utterances, and very decidedly of most of the speakers. Those who frequented Osborne Thrale's house were seceders from the Fabian and other societies, and were mostly the malcontents who were not likely to adhere long to any particular organisations governed by rules of law and order.

After the more formal part of the meeting was over, there was a good deal of informal talk, and they dispersed slowly, until there were only left in the room the two speakers, Mrs. Hemming and Philip Dane. Then it was that Philip Dane came over and shook hands with Hannah. He was a very intimate friend of the family. Hannah, indeed, regarded him more in the light of a brother than anything else, and they were comrades in every sense of the word. He was of a taciturn and gloomy nature, and there was something about the bright, sunny-hearted girl which attracted him very strongly. Yet he was not in love with her, nor she with him; it was not that sort of attraction, but

rather a spirit of sympathetic comradeship which was very satisfying to them both.

"You spoke awfully well to-night, Phil," she said quietly, and then added in a whisper, so that it might not be overheard by her father and Mrs. Hemming, who were talking together on the platform, "Oh, I say, didn't friend Olivia surpass herself to-night, and did you see how she completely bowled over my guest, who sat behind the door?"

"Yes, I did," answered Dane, with an answering gleam of amusement in his earnest dark eyes. "Who was the lady, by the by?"

"Oh, you will be interested to hear," answered Hannah quickly. "That was Joyce Wyndham's mother. And what do you think, Philip, she actually came to see for herself whether we were fit company for Joyce, and, after Mrs. Hemming's outpourings on the marriage laws, I feel my heart down in my boots."

Dane looked at her with a kind of incredulous interest. She was often so full of gay banter which meant nothing, that he was puzzled for the moment to know whether she was now in earnest or not.

"Quite true," she said, with a nod. "I went up this afternoon to see whether Joyce would come to the meeting. She has wanted to come, you know, dreadfully, for ever so long, and of course I had to

ask permission from her mother. She offered to come instead, and now I doubt it is all over between Joyce and me."

"Oh, surely not," said Dane, with a good deal of earnestness. "It will be easy enough for you to explain that Mrs. Hemming is no particular friend of yours."

"Well, but she is," retorted Hannah quickly; "and I am not going to go back on Mrs. Hemming for all the Joyces in the world. Mind you, I am very fond of Joyce, and I think there is the making of a splendid woman in her; but, all the same, if she comes as one of us, she has got to swallow us whole. Do you understand?"

Philip smiled, and the smile made a wonderful difference to his somewhat gloomy face. He had fine, clear-cut features, and there was a good deal of strength in the square-cut jaw, and a certain undeniable power in the high and intellectual brow which set him apart as one gifted beyond the common.

"They are so dreadfully narrow-minded, those complacent suburban folk," said Hannah presently. "Mrs. Wyndham is, figuratively speaking, a dead wall. Her prejudices are so strong that there is no overcoming them. She calls herself a Liberal, and I believe they read the *Chronicle* up at Over-

ton; but Mrs. Wyndham is the bluest of the blue as far as strict Conservatism is concerned."

"And do you really think that she would go so far as to forbid your being friendly with her daughter simply because of what she heard here to-night?"

"I am sure of it, my dear boy," replied Hannah promptly. "I saw it in her face. I am really very sorry, but I rather think there will be some trouble over it, for Joyce is a little headstrong, and is beginning to demand greater liberty than they are inclined to allow her. What should you think is my duty in this instance?"

"Well, if she wants to be friendly with you, you cannot very well refuse, can you?" said Dane, and it struck Hannah that his reply took the form of a rather anxious question.

"I think I shall simply let matters drift; I do not see what else I can do," she said. "Now I must go and rescue father from friend Olivia. Don't you think he looks dreadfully bored? Sometimes, after a tiring day or an unusually exciting meeting, he looks so old it cuts me to the heart."

The girl's face became suffused with a tenderness so living and so exquisite that it struck Philip Dane almost painfully. He knew that she was devotedly attached to her father, but never had the

passion of her love been so revealed to him. It made him sad; he had seen a good deal of the dark side of life, and he knew that those suffer most who love most truly, and it struck him what a desolate creature Hannah Thrale would be upon the face of the earth were her father taken from her.

"What are you thinking of?" she asked, suddenly struck by the intenseness of his look.

"I was thinking of you," he answered simply; "and though I do not pray much, Hannah, I could pray that you and he may be spared to each other for many years."

She answered him only by a quick nod; her heart was too full for speech. Then she crossed the room rapidly to her father's side.

"You want your coffee badly, father. Will you join us, Mrs. Hemming? Only on condition that you don't speak much," she said, with a delicious mixture of frankness and naïveté. "You see, daddy is so dreadfully tired, and I have to take such care of him. He is just like a baby in my hands."

As she stood at his side she laid her cheek on his shoulder, and he bent his grey head until it touched hers. The pathos of the picture struck the two who looked on, and long remained a memory in their hearts.

"Oh, I won't stay, my dear," said Mrs. Hemming promptly. "I know I speak too much, but it is not always that one has such a sympathetic listener. You are right to take care of him, child. Osborne Thrale is precious to many hearts, and London cannot spare him yet."

"I am spoiled by my friends," said the old man, with a sweet smile, "and I think my Hannah is apt to indulge me too much. I hope you will stay if you can; we shall be honoured by your company."

There was a certain old-fashioned chivalry in his manner towards women, which impressed even the most advanced who wished to fight shoulder to shoulder with men without being shown any of the little courtesies which most women prize. Mrs. Hemming believed Osborne Thrale to be one of the very few good men still left in the land.

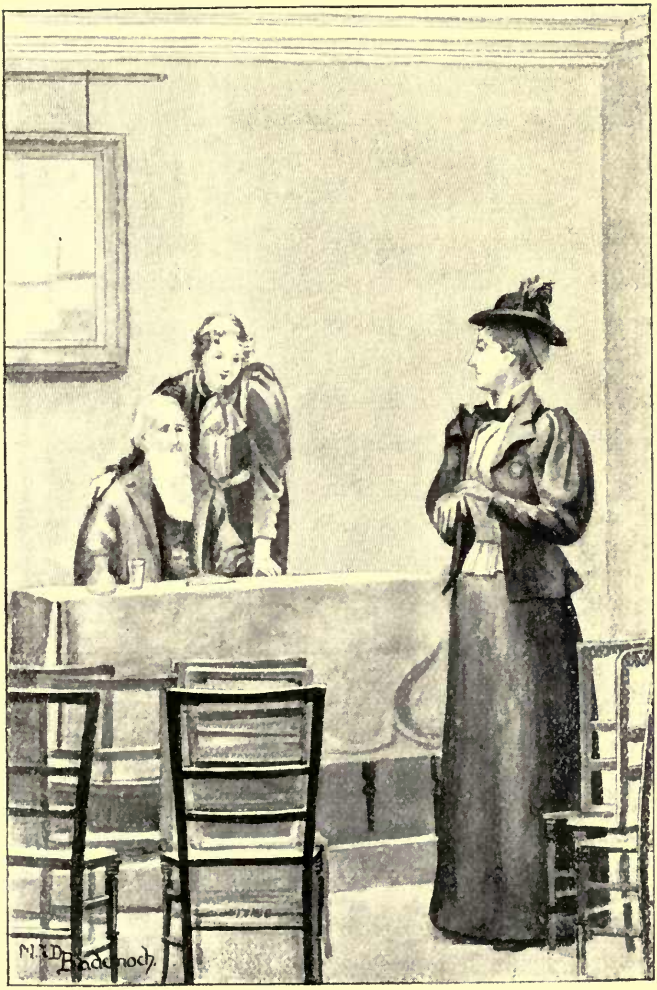
"I won't stay to-night, thank you—perhaps another night. Just 'get me my jacket, will you, child? I must be going."

Hannah brought the unlovely and ill-fitting garment from its peg in the hall, and helped her to dress. Then Philip Dane went downstairs and put her in the omnibus which bore her to her home.

When he returned to the house, Hannah called to him to come into the kitchen. The little maid went early to bed, and the Thrales often spent a cosy hour

by the kitchen fire, where Hannah made the coffee on the stove, and set out the modest repast on the little deal table. It was very quiet, too, being at the back of the house, and removed from the din and traffic of the street. Philip Dane was very much at home in that little den, which he sometimes declared was the pleasantest spot to him in the whole of London. Osborne Thrale regarded Philip Dane almost as a son. He had befriended him in his friendless youth, and often wished, for Dane's own sake, that he had chosen a different career. He always called himself a workman, and there was a certain pride in the self-adopted title. He was, in reality, the manager of a large building concern which employed a great many men. He felt his position very acutely, because he was in a manner muzzled, and knew that to seek to disseminate the doctrines which were as gospel to him among his fellow workmen would have meant instant dismissal. This to Philip Dane would have mattered nothing had there been only himself to consider; but of his private life we shall hear again.

They talked earnestly while Hannah busied herself about the supper-table. She was interested, of course, in the subject of their talk, and yet she did not listen with that avidity which sometimes distinguished her, and Dane thought her singularly silent. He would have been very much astonished could he



"Oh, I won't stay, my dear," said Mrs. Hemming promptly.

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have followed the train of her thought. She was thinking of the breezy stretch of common where she had been that afternoon, and of the pleasant seat under the trees, where she and Joyce had been waited on by sundry tall fellows in flannel suits and straw hats, who looked as if they had no vocation on earth except to interest and amuse them.

Philip Dane did not make any fresh allusions to Joyce, although he remained later than usual, but the look which had been on his face when she was spoken of remained in Hannah's mind, and she could not refrain from mentioning it to her father when they were alone.

"I am afraid it is all up between Joyce and me, daddy," she said, when she came back from the door, where she had bidden Dane good-night. "How many times do you suppose Philip Dane and Joyce have met here?"

"I could not say, child. Why do you ask such an odd question?" queried the old man, looking up rather interested.

"Oh, because I thought that Philip looked quite unduly distressed when I said to him that I thought friend Olivia had rung the death-knell to our friendship. Could you imagine any catastrophe more appalling than that Philip Dane and Joyce should fall in love with each other?"

It was a proof of the intimate understanding which existed between Osborne Thrale and his daughter that she could thus confide to him every fleeting thought. He looked rather amused, not moved to take her seriously.

"Philip Dane is a very fine young man, and any woman might be proud to call him husband," he said warmly; "but I do not think he is a marrying man."

"Oh, all men say that until they meet the woman they want," said Hannah quickly. "But really, it would be a comedy, only it might very easily develop into a tragedy. I do hope there is nothing in it."

"What makes you think there might be?"

"Well, a kind of indescribable look I saw in Philip's eyes when I spoke of it, and now that I come to think of it I believe I have noticed the very same look in Joyce's eyes. You know they do like to talk to each other; you have noticed that yourself. Perhaps it will be a very good thing for all concerned if Mrs. Wyndham does put her foot down very strongly, and I do not think there is any doubt that she will do it."

"Were I Joyce Wyndham's father," observed Osborne Thrale, "I should not take the least objection to Philip Dane as a son-in-law. He has a fine intellect and a heart of gold."

"Well, but you and Joyce Wyndham's father are

two very different persons, daddy, and I can assure you that Philip Dane might just as well ask one of the Queen's daughters as ask for Joyce. However, I hope things are not so serious as that. It will be rather interesting, now, awaiting the development of events. Do you think I should go up to Overton Hall to-morrow?"

"Why not?" asked the old man. He did not, of course, appreciate the situation so much as Hannah. "You had better go up, I think, and see what Mrs. Wyndham thought of our meeting. I am very glad that she heard Philip. Don't you think he spoke well?"

"Yes; but she also heard Mrs. Hemming," said Hannah, with a groan, "and I do not think it possible for us to explain her away."

CHAPTER VI.

IN A CLERKENWELL FLAT.

PHILIP DANE lived in Clerkenwell, occupying a small flat at the very top of one of those huge model buildings which have been erected in place of the old insanitary dwellings occupied by the poor in that and other neighbourhoods. It was almost midnight when he fitted his latch-key in his own door, but the roar of traffic was still in the streets, the car bells jingled noisily, and the taverns were beginning to disgorge their frequenters as the closing hour approached. It was, comparatively speaking, quiet in the top storey of the building. A long climb up the weary stairs was rewarded by a breath of clear air, and it was possible to obtain from the windows a sweeping view over the great forest of roofs in that thickly populated part of London. The clear, high, massive dome of St. Paul's stood out against the blueness of the sky, lit by a glorious moon already on the wane. Philip Dane loved his little home in

that busy hive, and he would not have exchanged it for the palace of a king. It pleased him to dwell among his fellow-workers, among the people whose needs and wants, whose sorrows and temptations he knew, and sometimes could alleviate. He knew every family in the building, and was honoured and loved by them as a wise friend and a sympathising counsellor, who neither spared sympathy nor rebuke. He opened the door softly, and walked along the little passage with the gentle step of a man who fears to disturb someone within.

"It's all right, Philly, I'm not sleeping," called out a shrill, sweet voice, to which Dane replied by a cheery whistle as he hung up his hat.

"And what do you mean by being awake at this hour of the night, you rogue?" he cried banteringly. "I shall have to give up going out in the evenings, Bobbie, if you are to lie awake like this, with your great eyes staring out into the darkness, counting the minutes, I suppose, until I come home."

By the time he had finished this speech he was in the middle of the kitchen, and had turned up the gas. It was a very small, humble place, but neat and scrupulously clean. It was furnished with the usual articles for kitchen use, but had in addition a little cot bed, which stood in a recess at the further side of the fireplace, and was occupied by the person ad-

dressed as Bobbie. To look at him as he lay there, with his pale, sharp-featured face framed by its dark curls, might have given a chance observer the impression that he was a mere child; but after a minute or two his face seemed to assume an older look; the features had none of the rounded softness of childhood, and there was a wise and sad look in the eyes which spoke of experience, and also of suffering. Bobbie was the only relative Philip Dane had on earth, and though there was a disparity of ten years in their ages, they loved each other with a love seldom seen between brothers, and were comrades and companions who had never had a difference or a shadow of a cloud upon the perfect understanding between them. The tie which bound them was one of rare pathos. Bobbie was one of those whom we speak of sorrowfully as the deformed; he had suffered from early childhood with a spinal complaint, which had grown worse and worse year by year, and though he now suffered less than formerly, he was entirely helpless, and dependent on others for every comfort and necessity of his life. This legacy Philip Dane's mother had left to him on her dying bed, and he had fulfilled his vow to her with a devotion and unselfishness which is rare. It was repaid by Bobbie's adoring worship, absolute, passionate, and intense. The world, indeed, held but one

object for Bobbie Dane: his whole life was summed up in the word Philip.

He raised himself on his elbow as his brother entered the kitchen, and his big black eyes grew round and wide with interest as he asked what kind of a meeting they had had. It was not to be wondered at that Bobbie took an interest in such things far beyond his years. He had nothing to do but lie and think when he was tired with reading, and he was a fervent disciple of the doctrines in which his brother believed, seeing eye to eye with him in everything. The discussions which took place in that little kitchen in the top floor of Brandon Buildings would have astonished and opened the eyes of any who had been privileged to overhear them. It was not very long before Bobbie discovered that his brother was much quieter than usual—the loving eye is quick to discern every passing change on the face of the loved one. Bobbie saw that Philip was grieved or troubled about something, and that he was not so ready as usual to reply to his eager questions.

"When is Hannah coming to see me?" he asked, by way of making a little diversion, when he saw Philip sit down at the fireplace and take up his pipe without making any effort to get himself a bit of supper.

"Oh, I don't know, I didn't ask her. I daresay

she'd come to-morrow if she knew you wanted to see her."

"I do want to see her, always," answered Bobbie quickly. "It is two weeks since she was here. Will you tell her that when you see her?"

"Yes, I will. I daresay she'll come at once. Would you like me to write a little note to her, as I don't think I shall be seeing her for a few days?"

"Why, ain't they going to have any more meetings?" queried Bobbie, with interest.

"Not just yet. There is a demonstration in Hyde Park on Sunday afternoon, and I am going to take you to see it."

"Are you?" asked Bobbie, his face flushing with excitement and pleasure. "But how can you take me? I am too big to carry."

"Yes, to carry all the way; but I think, perhaps, I might be able to afford a hansom for such a great occasion," said Philip, with a slow, affectionate smile. "Just think of that, Bobbie, a ride in a hansom, and then a seat on the platform in Hyde Park. Then you will hear Mr. Thrale speak, and Hannah will be there, too."

"You like Hannah, don't you, Philly?" asked the boy, with his big black eyes fixed searchingly on his brother's face.

"Yes, I like Hannah immensely; in fact I don't

think I like anybody in the world better except you."

"Oh, I am so glad you said 'except you,'" cried the boy, "and that is all right. I don't mind you liking her after me."

Dane listened to the boy's chatter without noticing that it had a certain significance. Bobbie had many strange thoughts as he lay there through the long hours of the afternoon and evening, after the neighbour who came to do the housework had gone for the day. He also built many towering and lovely castles in the air. One of them, perhaps the greatest favourite of all, was of a day that should come when Philip should marry Hannah Thrale, and when they should all go into the country and live in a little cottage planted in an old-fashioned garden, where grew the roses and hollyhocks which Bobbie had read of but never seen. This dream was too fondly cherished as yet to be shared even with his brother. This was indeed the first hint that he had ever dropped concerning it, and he was rather glad than otherwise to see that Philip did not take it up.

It was rather a disappointing evening to Bobbie altogether. Philip smoked his pipe almost in silence, and when it went out he said good-night rather abruptly, and went off to bed. But next morning he

was pleasant and talkative as usual, although he did not say very much about his experience of the previous evening. This gave Bobbie quite sufficient to reflect upon all day.

Dane was engaged on some building not far removed from the Thrales' house, in Camberwell Road. At the dinner hour, after he had partaken of his simple lunch, he had sufficient time to make a call there, and felt moved to do it. As he came out of the side street in which the building shed was situated, and into the busier thoroughfare of Camberwell Road, he saw Joyce Wyndham alight from a car at the terminus where it had stopped. He felt annoyed with himself that his face should so quickly flush; he was in his workman's garb, and was not ashamed of it, but he hesitated a moment whether to wait for her recognition or hurry on as if he had not seen her. She, however, solved his difficulty by a pleasant smile and bow as she stepped from the car, and as he raised his cap she came forward and extended her hand frankly. It was the sort of thing which pleased Joyce very much at that stage of her advancing thought—to speak to a workman in his working garb in the street in the broad light of day, to shake hands with him as if he were a valued friend, and to observe that one or two people were struck by her action, gave her quite a little thrill of

excitement. It did not displease her to behold on the opposite side of the road a maiden lady who was on intimate visiting terms with her mother, and who, she felt sure, would not fail to give her a highly-coloured account of the affair. She was looking well, and was always becomingly dressed; but that was no particular credit to her—her mother ordering and directing every item of her attire. Philip Dane was pleased when she spoke to him, simply, genuinely, and honestly happy. He had never before felt the slightest sensitiveness regarding his position or appearance, and it troubled him a good deal that he should be visited even by occasional qualms regarding it.

"You did not come to the meeting last night, Miss Wyndham," he said, looking into her face with his honest, piercing eyes; "but I heard from Miss Thrale that your mother was present."

"Yes, and oh, she has gone on about it ever since! Whatever did Mrs. Hemming say or do last night? She seems to have horrified my mother terribly. I have heard ominously little about it, and that makes me fear all the more."

"Fear what?" asked Dane sharply.

"Fear that she won't let me come any more. Isn't it horrid to be tied up as I am? I am really a kind of first-class prisoner, Mr. Dane; I can't do anything

or go anywhere, scarcely, without leave. I do envy Hannah."

"But you have a very happy home, Miss Thrale tells me," Dane ventured to say.

Joyce gave her shoulders a little shrug.

"Oh, yes, I am quite happy as far as my home is concerned; I have no fault to find with it. Indeed, I should be most ungrateful if I said anything else; but I do want to see something outside the four walls of Overton Hall. There are too many restrictions. For instance, if mother were to see me speaking to you now, she would be sure to have something to say about it. That is the sort of thing I can't stand, really, Mr. Dane. What should you advise me to do?"

She said this with a charming frankness which almost carried Philip Dane away.

"Well, I don't think there is anything you can do," he answered, quietly enough. "Perhaps by-and-by your father and mother may give you a little more liberty. Of course, you are still very young."

"Not so very young," put in Joyce quickly. "I am nineteen, only a little younger than Hannah, and she has been her own mistress ever so long."

"Ah, but you see she lost her mother when she was a mere girl, and had to fill a woman's place. That makes a great difference."

"I suppose it does," said Joyce, with rather a discontented look on her face. "How is your poor little brother? Hannah has told me about him."

Dane's face flushed; her sympathy and interest were sweet to him, doubly sweet as they were quite unexpected.

"Oh, he is as well as he will ever be, poor little chap," he answered, and Joyce was struck by the lingering tenderness of his voice, and by the softness in his eye as he spoke. "But he is very bright, and never complains, even when he happens to have a very bad day."

"I should love to come and see him. Do you think I might, one day?"

"You might, certainly, if you would be so kind," replied Dane, a trifle unsteadily. "Bobbie has not many visitors; he knows how to prize them when they come. May I tell him you will come one day?"

"Yes, do. When shall I come? I always like to settle things if possible. I have no sympathy with the people who are always talking vaguely about doing things, have you?"

"I have certainly more sympathy with the workers than the talkers," answered Dane readily. "If you could come on a Saturday afternoon or a Sunday, I should then share in Bobbie's pleasure."

"Then I will come on Saturday with Hannah, if I can arrange with her," answered Joyce quickly. "Now I must positively go, for it is lunch time, and we are nothing if not punctual at home. I am very glad to have seen you. Good-bye."

She extended her hand frankly to him as before, and the shade of her lace parasol softened the flush which his close hand-clasp brought to her face. There was something more than mere elation at her own daring in Joyce Wyndham's heart as she walked slowly up Denmark Hill, a thing she could not, and did not seek, to analyse. As for Dane, he turned back from his intention of visiting the Thrales, and re-entering the building yard, sat down on a stool and smoked another pipe. What were the thoughts accompanying it, who shall tell?

CHAPTER VII.

DAUGHTER AGAINST MOTHER.

JOYCE and her mother generally lunched alone; sometimes a friend would drop in at that informal meal, however, and Mrs. Wyndham, hospitable by nature, always accorded them a warm welcome. When Joyce walked into the house a little late that day, she was astonished, and a little annoyed, to find with her mother the lady who had observed her talking with Philip Dane. Her name was Miss Maddison. She was an elderly spinster, who had a large income, and nothing to do but concern herself with other people's business, which she did most assiduously. During the five minutes she had been in the house with Mrs. Wyndham she had not failed to acquaint her with the little scene she had witnessed at the bottom of Denmark Hill. Mrs. Wyndham heard her politely, clever enough to assume an indifference she was far from feeling. She had been very much upset all day, and had indeed been bracing herself to have it out

with Joyce. Miss Maddison's presence at lunch was not altogether unwelcome to her; she was a woman who hated scenes, and she feared that her plain talking to her daughter would cause her a good deal of pain. Joyce heartily disliked Miss Maddison, and as she saw no particular reason why she should be civil to her if she did not feel inclined, she left the conversation almost entirely to her mother and their guest.

"You are very quiet, Joyce, my dear," said Miss Maddison, suddenly leaving her talk of church matters with Mrs. Wyndham, and pouncing down upon Joyce, with her double eye-glass set firmly across her piercing black eyes. "Perhaps you are thinking of the *tête-à-tête* you had down the road. Pray, who was your interesting companion?"

"His name is Dane, but I don't suppose you are any the wiser, Miss Maddison," said Joyce, in her most disagreeable manner. "Mother, may I leave the table? It is so very hot, and I don't want any pudding."

"You may, certainly, if you wish it," replied Mrs. Wyndham, but she was not well pleased. Joyce, however, did not care. She could not tolerate the presence and company of Miss Maddison in her present mood, and she hoped with all her heart that she would take herself off whenever lunch was

over. This she did, finding the atmosphere of the Wyndham household less pleasant than usual. Her next step was to walk on to a neighbouring house, and give it as her opinion that there was something decidedly queer about Joyce Wyndham.

Mrs. Wyndham walked to the front gate with her visitor, and then sought Joyce in a little summer-house hidden among the trees, which was her favourite resort on these hot afternoons. She was sitting idly, with her hands clasped on her lap, and when her mother entered she merely moved up a little on the seat in order to make room for her, but made no remark. Mrs. Wyndham sat down, and after a full minute's silence turned to her daughter.

"I wish to speak to you, Joyce."

"Yes, mother," Joyce answered quietly, "I know you do. I have been waiting for you to speak all day."

"I have thought a good deal, my dear, about what I am going to say," said Mrs. Wyndham, "because I wish it to be final. Before I go any further, my dear, I would like to ask you one question."

"Yes, mother," answered Joyce, in a wonderfully subdued voice.

"Are you assured of our love for you, your father's and mine?"

"Why, yes, mother; I have never doubted it. How should I?" Joyce answered quickly enough.

"If you are assured of that, then, Joyce, you must believe that we have nothing but your best interests at heart, and that we would not willingly do anything to vex or even to cross you. I think we have done our best to give you a happy life."

"Oh, yes, you have given me everything, and I haven't been grateful enough," Joyce answered.

"We have sacrificed some things for you, even, but I need not enter into that here. I daresay you will understand what all these preliminaries mean. I am going to ask you to do something for us now."

"Yes, I know," said Joyce, in a low, dull voice, "give up Hannah Thrale."

"Yes. I went to the meeting last night with an unprejudiced mind, although you may not believe that, and I tried to take a just view of what I saw and heard, and I came away determined that you should not have any further dealings with these people if I could help it."

"I should like very much, mother, if you will tell me what you did hear," said Joyce, still quietly, but with a harder note in her voice.

"I don't see that anything is to be gained by going over what I heard, Joyce; a good deal of nonsense, and a good deal of what I considered worse than

nonsense—most pernicious teaching, and I did not at all like the look of the people; they are a common set entirely. I am not speaking of Hannah Thrale and her father; they are gentlefolk, anyone can see that, and yet people are known, are they not, by the company they keep?"

"I do not think that Hannah has ever got any harm from such company, mother," said Joyce gloomily; "and they are all very much in earnest. It seems to me that they have something to live for; I have nothing."

The last words were uttered with a good deal of passion, and they sent a stab to her mother's heart.

"I am sorry to hear you say you have nothing to live for; one might think that your father and mother and your brother counted for a little. However, let it pass. I spoke to your father last night, and he entirely agreed with me that you should stop your intimacy with the Thrales. We have both noticed a great change in you since you began to be so much in Hannah's company."

"What kind of a change, mother, may I ask?" asked Joyce quickly.

"Well, you are growing so discontented that nothing seems to satisfy you. You do not take that healthy interest which a girl of your age ought to take in the ordinary affairs of life."

"They are so trivial," replied Joyce. "I can't think how any human being could be satisfied with the ordinary routine of life which falls to the lot of a girl in my position."

"That is the distorted view you take of it, my dear," answered her mother sadly. "There are very many who might envy you. I am quite willing to admit that it is a little hard upon you to be called upon to give up your friend, and in order that it may be done gradually, in the way which would make you feel it least, your father and I are both agreed that it would be a very good plan for you to go to Paris, and live six months with your Aunt Grace."

A year ago such a proposal would have filled Joyce with the liveliest delight, but now it did not even cause a flutter at her heart.

"You are banishing me as if I were a criminal. Do you think that six months of Aunt Grace would make me forget Hannah Thrale? It is a mistake, mother."

"I don't care whether you forget her or not," replied her mother firmly; "but I am determined that there shall be no comings and goings to her house so long as those extraordinary and objectionable people frequent it. Understand that my mind is finally made up on this point, Joyce. I have given in a good deal to you of late, but there comes a time when a

parent must assert her authority, or her position is lost."

"But why should I be under authority?" cried Joyce rebelliously. "I am nineteen, and I am not a fool; surely I know my own mind, and it shows how very little you can trust me, mother, if you think I am going to be contaminated by any of the foolish things that are said at socialistic meetings in Mr. Thrale's house. Why, even Hannah herself sees through them and makes fun of them."

"All the same, they exercise a sort of influence upon character and life," replied Mrs. Wyndham. "Hannah Thrale is a very capable young woman, who can look after herself, and besides, she is of a stronger and more practical nature than you. Believe me, Joyce, I know what I am talking about, and I am sure that if you allow yourself to be carried away by the false teaching of those dissenters from all law and order, you will make shipwreck of your life."

Joyce remained silent, but an active rebellion shone in her eyes, which seemed to be aimlessly watching the leaves fluttering in the June sunshine.

"You heard what Miss Maddison said at lunch," said Mrs. Wyndham, suddenly changing the subject. "She gave me a little account of what she had seen down the road. Of course I understood it to be slightly embellished, but what I want to know is,

what acquaintance have you with this young fellow Dane? He may be very clever, but is, I understand, quite a common workman."

Joyce's face flushed hotly.

"I have very little acquaintance with him. I have seen him once or twice at the Thrales', that is all. Miss Maddison is a hateful old gossip. Women like her, who have no occupation but gadding about from house to house retailing gossip and tearing up people's characters, ought to be shut up. I think they are quite as dangerous as lunatics."

"That is not the point, Joyce," said Mrs. Wyndham. "Understand that neither your father nor I choose that you should be on intimate terms with any person, a young man especially, whom we cannot invite to the house."

"You might invite him," said Joyce, with a slight, enigmatical smile, "but he would not come."

Somehow the tone of the words and the expression which accompanied them irritated Mrs. Wyndham in no small degree.

"That is not a becoming way to speak, Joyce," she said sharply. "I see that you are not at all inclined to be guided by us in this matter. I should like to put a straight question to you. Suppose you don't go to your Aunt Grace, would

you continue your friendship with Hannah Thrale against our expressed wish?"

"Mother, I am afraid I should," Joyce answered, with a good deal of quiet daring. This contest had been imminent for a considerable time, and now that it had arrived, she was determined not to be a coward. "I know you are dreadfully shocked; but listen, mother, and I am sure you will see the injustice of it. Here am I at nineteen, almost a woman, ordered as if I were a mere child to give up the friend I love best in the world. Even you yourself admit that Hannah Thrale is a splendid woman, and it is only because you are afraid of the objectionable people I may meet at their house that you wish to put an end to our friendship. What explanation can I give her? I think it would be most cruel and wicked to ask me to do any such thing."

"Nevertheless, we do not only ask it, but we shall insist upon it," said Mrs. Wyndham, in a tone which Joyce had not often heard, but which she knew to be final. "It is painful for us, my dear," she added sadly, "that any such discussion or difference should ever be possible between us. I was very happy when you were born, and I said to your father that I had nothing on earth left to wish for. We had a good deal of anxiety over

you when you were a baby, and I had to pray to God many a time to bring you back to us from the very brink of the grave. I did not anticipate a sorrow like this, Joyce."

"But why should it be a sorrow?" asked Joyce quickly, secretly moved by her mother's words, and by the distressed look on her face. "Don't you think that a girl ought to be allowed to choose her own friends?"

Mrs. Wyndham shook her head. "She is often, by reason of her inexperience and lack of knowledge of the world, the very worst person to choose her own friends. In this case you must permit me to be the better judge, Joyce. I know how it is with you, how easily your sympathies are aroused, and how your passionate temperament is quick to respond to the appeals made to your heart rather than to your judgment. It is very bad for a young girl to make herself conspicuous in any way, and you will certainly very soon become conspicuous and talked about if you identify yourself with the people who hold meetings at the house of the Thrales."

"It is Mrs. Grundy you are afraid of, mother," said Joyce, with a faint, scornful smile; "but I assure you that I am not going to allow Mrs. Grundy to be the ruler of my life."

"Nor your mother either, apparently," said Mrs. Wyndham, in a dry, hard voice, for she felt the futility of all their talk. "Then you will not break your connection with the Thrales for your father's sake and mine?"

"I don't see how I can, mother, and really, if I give in on this point, where is it to end? I shall have no liberty of action whatever."

"Then you may prepare for six months in Paris," said Mrs. Wyndham curtly. "I shall write to your Aunt Grace to-night."

So saying she rose, and walking into the house, shut herself in her own room, where she shed some very bitter tears. It was the first time Joyce had openly defied her, and she felt for the time being almost at her wit's end.

CHAPTER VIII.

A TALK WITH HANNAH THRALE.

JOYCE sat still for about a quarter of an hour after her mother left her, and then she got up as if struck by a sudden thought, and entering the house, got her gloves and sunshade. As she walked rather quickly down the shady side of the hill, and thence to the shelterless pavements of Camberwell Road, she felt considerable excitement, not unmingled with a certain exultation, for this was her first revolting step, and she wondered much what would be the outcome of it. No qualms of conscience visited her; she considered that she was unjustly dealt with, that her mother treated her too much like a child, and she believed that the time had come when she should make a stand for her position.

Hot as it was out of doors, the little sitting-room of the Thrales was wonderfully cool; the blinds were closely drawn, and both windows being wide open, a pleasant current of air passed through the

room, and when Joyce was admitted by the little maid-servant, she sank into the nearest chair with a sigh of content. Presently, Hannah came to her with a big cooking-apron over her print gown, and sundry little patches of flour, not unbecoming, on her cheeks and chin.

"I was making a cake, and the crucial moment in the beating-up process had just arrived as you came to the door. That is why you have had to wait," she said. "Isn't it hot? I think I have been rather expecting you all day."

"Can you sit down now," said Joyce, "and let us have a good talk? I have ever so many things to say to you."

"Well, just wait till I take off my apron and rub the smudges off my face," said Hannah, and with a nod she left her.

Joyce removed her gloves, took her hat off, then leaning back in the rocking-chair, she swayed gently to and fro enjoying the cool and darkened atmosphere of the room. When Hannah returned she threw herself on the couch, and folding her arms under her head turned interestedly to her friend.

"Well, I am ready for the report. What was the verdict and the sentence?"

"What you might have expected," answered

Joyce. "Oh, Hannah, wasn't it the very irony of fate that your Mrs. Hemming should happen to have been at the meeting last night? Nothing worse could possibly have happened from mamma's point of view."

"I knew it would be all up when I saw friend Olivia come in," said Hannah soberly; "but I hope that your mother will not put an end to our friendship, Joyce."

"She has done so," answered Joyce; "at least she has told me this afternoon that she desires us to break with each other."

"And what did you say?" asked Hannah, with a good deal of interest.

"I refused," answered Joyce. "It was very difficult, of course, but I did refuse."

Hannah lay still a moment with her eyes turned towards the ceiling, where she watched the flies dancing for several minutes in silence.

"But where is the good?" she asked at length. "You know as well as I do, Joyce, that you cannot be intimate with me if your mother says no."

"Why can't I?" asked Joyce, with a distinctly rebellious note in her voice. "A man does not ask his father and mother's leave to have a friend. Why should I?"

"I don't think that your brother has many

friends of whom his father and mother do not approve," observed Hannah quietly.

"That is right enough," answered Joyce; "but then, you see, there are few such good boys as Tom. You know as well as I do that men constantly make and keep friends outside, whom their home people do not at all approve of."

"What is the inference?" asked Hannah, with a lazy smile. "That I am an objectionable acquaintance who ought to be kept outside?"

"Don't be tiresome, Hannah," said Joyce quickly. "And you don't seem to me to take this matter as seriously as it ought to be taken. Here have I defied my mother for your sake, and you don't seem to mind a bit. It is because I think you are worth the sacrifice, Hannah, that I have made it."

"But am I worth it?" asked Hannah. "And what is to be the end of it. I assure you I am quite serious, Joyce. Now, let us look at this thing in its true light."

"Well, what would you call its true light?" asked Joyce. "Let me hear it."

"Well, suppose you keep on coming here to visit me, and attending the meetings if you like, without your mother's consent, it would be very uncomfortable for you at home. If you want a quite frank expression of opinion from me, Joyce, I should say

that, looking at it from your point of view, it would not be worth your while."

"But what is my point of view, Hannah? I don't think you understand it," said Joyce, a little passionately. "You seem to forget that I may have some little interest in the cause."

Hannah elevated her eyebrows.

"Oh, yes, you may have an interest in the cause, of course; but supposing you had a very keen interest indeed, you cannot do very much to help it on. You are only a single girl, Joyce, and I believe myself that you could do a good deal to help in a quiet way by staying at home."

Joyce looked much annoyed. She had not expected a reception such as this. She had come rushing off to her friend, expecting sympathy and approval of her revolt, and lo! she was met by such reservations and cautious advice as might have fallen from her mother's lips.

"It is a career I want," she cried passionately. "I cannot make you out, Hannah; you are quite different from the girl who used to carry me away with her enthusiasm. What has made you lukewarm of late?"

"I am not lukewarm, dear; but I flatter myself I have one grain of common sense left, and I fail to see what good you would be to the cause or to any-

body else by making a complete breach with your excellent parents."

There was a moment's silence, which both felt to be a trifle constrained. Hannah Thrale knew very well what a blow she was inflicting on the enthusiastic heart of her friend, but she believed that she was acting and speaking for the best.

"You don't want to join the new brotherhood, do you?" she asked presently. "Of course, if you want to do that, it is a different matter."

"I would do anything," cried Joyce passionately, "to get out of this horrible narrow groove in which I have been sitting at ease so long. You don't know what it is to have one's soul ground down as mine has been by the awful narrowness and conventionality of our lives. I simply can't stand it. I shall run away, or do something dreadful."

"You may run away," answered Hannah shrewdly, "but I don't think you would stop away very long. Were I your mother, Joyce, I should allow you to have your fling, to use a vulgar but very expressive phrase, just for one little year, because I know it would end in your coming back cured."

"Oh, Hannah, I am so disappointed!" cried Joyce, with so much genuine feeling in her voice that her companion felt a little twinge at her heart. "After all our lovely talks, and the high ideals we have

discussed together, to think that you should come down to such a level! What has come over you?"

"Nothing," answered Hannah; but she did not meet the reproachful gaze of Joyce's eyes. "Perhaps it is that I am becoming a little cynical and worldly-wise. A year or two ago I felt just as you do; but I am beginning to see into the heart of things, and they are not what they were, in my estimation, at least. Do let us talk of something else just for a minute. Do you know I have got another situation?"

"Have you?" asked Joyce, with a very real interest. "Where?"

"In one of the Lambeth Board Schools; and I enter on my duties on Monday."

"A Board School," re-echoed Joyce, rather doubtfully. "Surely that is a downcome; and won't it be fearfully hard work?"

"Yes, it is hard work; but it is much more interesting work, I assure you, than anything we had to do at Acacia House. In the Board Schools we do have a little human nature to work upon; they are not all cut in the conventional pattern, and are sometimes allowed to forget that there is such a thing in the world as deportment."

Joyce laughed. This was a speech which the old

Hannah might have made, and it was pleasanter in Joyce Wyndham's ears than the new wisdom.

"Lambeth—isn't that a long way for you to go from here?" she asked.

"Oh, we shall have to move. We are thinking seriously of joining the new settlement."

"Where is it to be?" asked Joyce eagerly.

"It isn't quite decided yet, but probably about Lambeth or Clerkenwell. Father thinks that it is our duty to go, although I do not particularly yearn for it myself."

"Who else will be in the settlement? Do tell me all about it, Hannah. I am perfectly famishing to hear every single, solitary detail."

"There isn't very much to tell," answered Hannah lightly. "A good many of the people you have seen here will be resident with us. I expect Mrs. Hemming for one, and Philip Dane and his little brother. The Marshes, too, I think, intend to come. Oh, I daresay we shall have quite a large family."

"I would give ten years of my life, Hannah," said Joyce fervently, "to be allowed to join that settlement."

"And to work as a School Board teacher at £50 a year," said Hannah drily. "My dear child, you don't know what you are talking about."

"Yes, I do," Joyce maintained. "What a very poor opinion you have of me if you think I can't live without the luxuries to which I have been accustomed. Why, I consider them as nothing."

"Until you are called upon to do without them," put in Hannah significantly.

"I wish you would tell me something more about the settlement," continued Joyce eagerly. "How will you live? will it be like a large family, in a way?"

"Yes," answered Hannah, "from what I hear, I understand we shall each have our own little suite of rooms, just as they do in other flats, and there will be a common dining-hall or meeting-place. Why don't you go and see Mrs. Hemming, Joyce? She would tell you much more about it; she is one of the moving spirits."

"Oh, I should not dare to go and see Mrs. Hemming; she would be sure to think it frightful presumption," exclaimed Joyce.

"No, she wouldn't; nothing delights her more than to explain the whole aims and objects of the brotherhood to anyone who will listen to her. But there, I am blowing hot and cold with one breath; first I tell you that it will be wiser for you to be quit of us, and then I advise you to go to the most enthusiastic of our members. I am a very poor sort of friend, Joyce,

and upon my word, I think the less you have to do with me the better."

Joyce, leaning both elbows on her knees, dropped her chin in her hands, and looked across at her friend searchingly. She could not make this Hannah out at all. She was so different from the old enthusiast, who, by her passionate and constant dwelling upon the themes in which the new brotherhood were interested, had first awakened the restless discontent in Joyce Wyndham's soul. She felt that there was some subtle change in the girl, a change of recent growth, and yet wherein did it profit to question Hannah, since she would give no satisfaction about her own inward feelings?

"You are frightfully changed, Hannah Thrale, and I would give, oh I don't know what, to know what has changed you. Won't you tell me?"

"I am not changed, Joyce," Hannah answered quickly. "I am talking against my convictions, too, and solely for your good. Do you suppose that I should not be pleased if you came to the settlement, and threw in your lot with the brotherhood, and don't I know that it is just such ardent, enthusiastic spirits that we want, if we are to do any service for those down-trodden ones whom we wish to raise a little higher, and to whom we would show, if we could, something of the beauty and the fulness of life

as it ought to be? But I am not without some regard for your father and mother, Joyce; they have been extremely kind to me, and I know very well that the step which might make us happy would break their hearts."

"But perhaps," said Joyce, "we might be able, in course of time, to modify their views; my father, especially, is a very kind-hearted man, and if we could convince him that it is good work for humanity that we have in view, and not a mere fad, I believe he would not only approve of my work, but help us himself."

But Hannah only shook her head.

"He would not; your father is a large employer of labour; he is one of the humanest and the most generous, consequently his work-people have no complaint. They are perfectly happy and content. But that is precisely the reason why your father would be harder than anybody to convince of the wrongs which we know to exist. Were I in your place, Joyce, I should try to banish all thought of the brotherhood and the cause from my mind, and devote myself to do such good as I could in the sphere open to me. You could be a friend to your father's work-people, and in that way help and please him, and I believe you would be in the end far happier yourself, because, remember, there is no end to our work, and

it is so heart-breaking and sad that it seems to take all the life out of one. Be warned in time, Joyce. I am really speaking seriously, and trying to be as unselfish as I can."

"It is too late," answered Joyce, with a sad, bitter note in her voice. "I have got a glimpse of the nether world, and I shall never rest until I have gone down into the depths, and tried to help those who are struggling there. It was you who first awakened in my heart any interest in this great question, Hannah, an interest which will never sleep again."

CHAPTER IX.

WHAT MR. WYNDHAM THOUGHT.

"I AM to be banished," said Joyce presently. "My mother ordains that I am to go immediately to Paris to be disciplined by Aunt Grace."

"Paris is very pleasant in June," observed Hannah, "and I should not mind going with you."

"But I am to be kept there for six months," said Joyce, with an odd little smile. "By that time mother thinks that I shall be cured."

"Perhaps you will," said Hannah quietly. "There is a very lively household at your Aunt Grace's, is there not; and a number of very entertaining cousins?"

"Oh, yes, they are very pleasant, once in a while; but I don't relish being sent off like this, and I have quite made up my mind that I am not going."

"It is open rebellion, then, Joyce," said Hannah thoughtfully. "Have you considered what it involves? You will have to make a choice, my dear, between your own people and us."

"I don't see that any choice requires to be made," answered Joyce quickly; "and I think that probably when my mother and father see how very much in earnest I am they will give in."

Hannah shook her head.

"I am not at all so sure about it."

'I wish Tom was a little more serious-minded," said Joyce; "he might be able to help me a lot. But as he is at present, he is no good. Besides, he looks upon mother as his ideal of all a woman should be."

"And a very good thing, too," Hannah made haste to answer. "It is so rare to find a young man regarding his mother as anything else than an old-fashioned person, that it is quite refreshing to come across one who has the courage to think as your brother does."

"Then you are against me all along the line," said Joyce a trifle bitterly, "and I must go through with the fight alone."

"I don't say that, dear; but I have a conscience, and also, perhaps, a clearer sense of duty than some, and I must say, when I come to think the matter over seriously, and especially after the talk I had with your mother the other day, I must say I think that your duty lies at home. But all the same, if you do elect to cast in your fortunes with us, I will

stand by you, Joyce, even although I may not think that you have acted wisely for yourself."

"It doesn't matter very much about that, I think," Joyce answered very soberly. "Oh, I wish I could make mother understand just how I feel. You see, she thinks now that it is a mere restless desire for change which pursues me; she does not know how I feel things, and how they eat into my heart. If only she were one little bit sympathetic, so that I could speak to her as I can speak to you."

Hannah was a trifle touched by the extreme earnestness with which Joyce spoke, and her face became rather sad.

"Upon my word, I am very sorry for you all, and I could wish that you had never had the misfortune to make my acquaintance. It has been a very good thing for me, Joyce, but not for you."

"Oh, you mustn't say that," cried Joyce eagerly. "Whatever happens I shall never regret having known you, Hannah Thrale; you have taught me so much, and made life seem worth living to me, even if it should be nothing but a conflict all along. Now I must go, for I did not say to mother that I was coming here, but I did so want to talk things over. I wish that you would say that you think I have done right, Hannah; it would help me ever so much."

But Hannah shook her head again.

"You see, I have no mother, Joyce, and perhaps on that account I am rather on the side of mothers. I feel that if I had one of my own I would rather die than grieve or cross her, although probably if she were alive now I should do both. But don't forget, dear, that though you make many kind friends in the world, you can only have one mother. Has your father spoken to you at all about it?"

"No, but I am going to speak to him to-night. Do you know what I am going to ask him, Hannah?"

Hannah shook her head.

"Something which I am afraid he will not grant," she said.

"I believe you are right there, but still I am going to try my luck. I am going to beg him to let me have a career, that is to say, I want to be allowed to earn my own living somehow or other. I am so tired of being merely ornamental; I want to be useful if I can."

"And what will you do?" asked Hannah, with considerable interest.

"Well, I think I should like to be allowed to teach in the same school with you; that is what would please me more than anything."

"You would soon tire of that," said Hannah, shaking her head. "It is frightful drudgery—everyone

will tell you so; and I should not be at all surprised if your father absolutely declined to give his consent to any such step. I must say I sympathise with you in your desire to do some work, but there is another thing to be considered, Joyce. Remember this, that if you succeed in getting a situation, of whatever kind, you may be taking the bread out of the mouth of another woman who needs it much more than you."

Joyce looked slightly startled. This view of the case had not before presented itself to her mind.

"That is one of the things that we have got to contend with in the labour market," said Hannah quickly. "I am sure you have often heard it spoken of at our meetings—so many people who do not require to work, but do so from various motives, and often under-sell those who have to earn their own bread. You would not wish to err in that way, would you?"

"Indeed, I should not," answered Joyce. "Oh, what a lot of difficulties there seem to be when one wants to do anything in this world."

"I should like to give you just one bit of advice, Joyce, before you go. Don't refuse to go to Paris. You have always enjoyed visiting your aunt there, and it is quite possible that you might come back with different views, which would make yourself and everybody else much happier. I am in earnest in

giving you this advice; I have thought the matter over well, and that is the conclusion I have come to."

"It is too late, as I have told you," repeated Joyce quickly. "You should have thought of that before you interested me in all the great questions which want people to help them on."

"Well, don't do anything rashly, dear; remember it is a much easier matter to lose a good home than to find it again, and that there are thousands of homeless people in this great city who would consider it madness to act as you are doing."

Joyce walked home rather soberly after the cold comfort given to her by her friend. She did not see her mother again until dinner, and then there was nothing said about what had passed in the afternoon, nor was there visible in her demeanour any special coldness, nor any sign, indeed, that the disagreement of the afternoon was remembered or brooded over, and yet it was the uppermost thought in Mrs. Wyndham's mind.

Alfred Wyndham noticed that his wife was a little less talkative than usual, but as Tom was present at the table conversation did not flag. That young man was always in a lively mood, and never at a loss for something to say. He took his mother for a stroll round the garden, while he smoked his cigar;

then Joyce, seizing her opportunity, remained with her father.

"Well, how have you and mamma been getting on to-day?" he asked, with a little twinkle in his eye. The whole affair rather amused him; it had seemed a little serious the previous night, when looked at through his wife's eyes; but the larger cares of his business day had almost banished it from his mind, or at least placed it among the minor worries. "I hope you are not going to vex her any more by going among these peculiar people. They seem quite unsuitable for you. We don't want our little girl spoilt, you know," he said, with an affectionate smile. "We want to keep her as fresh, and natural, and girlish as possible. What is the attraction those very odd cranks have for you, Joyce?"

Joyce sat down on a stool at her father's knee, and looked up into his face most seriously.

"Father, will you listen to me for a few minutes, if you please, and don't laugh at me, because I am very much in earnest? I have no hope of ever making mamma understand what I mean, and what I want to do; my only hope lies in you. Will you promise to take me seriously?"

"Yes, I will; I am quite willing to hear all you have to say, my dear."

"Well, then, father, ever since I was quite a young

girl at school, and especially after I got to know Hannah Thrale, I have thought about things so much that they give me no peace. I am always brooding over all the wrong, wicked things there are in the world, and I have often felt that it was almost sinful of me to be living at ease as I am now while so many people are suffering, and the worst of it all is that I have never done anything to earn this luxury in which I am living. Do you think it can be right to enjoy it?"

"I have earned it for you, my dear," returned Alfred Wyndham. "Your mother and I have both worked very hard for a great many years. What for, do you suppose? Merely that our boy and girl might have an easier time of it than we had, and all the return we want is that they should enjoy it heartily, and add a little brightness to our lives with their happy youth."

Joyce was silent a moment. There was a certain convincingness in her father's speech which held her for a moment. She was very fond of him, and would not willingly vex him, but at that particular stage of her experience she was a person of one idea. She was absolutely and completely wearied of her existence, and had brooded so long upon a change that it had become necessary to her.

"I understand just how you feel, papa," she said,

"and perhaps it is very wrong of me to have such thoughts as I have; but how am I to help it? I do wish you would let me go out in the world and earn my own living."

Alfred Wyndham laughed silently, and watched the blue wreath of his pipe-smoke ascending in the air.

"In what particular capacity do you think you would be able to earn your own living, little girl?" he asked, unconsciously adopting the very tone which most wounded Joyce, for she was very much in earnest. She wanted to be a woman, and to take a woman's place in the world, and to do a woman's work in some more congenial atmosphere than that which now surrounded her.

"I haven't been taught to do anything, of course, papa, but I can learn. Do you know what I should like better than anything in the whole world?"

"No; let me hear."

"Well, I should like to go away from here for quite a long time, and live among the people who have to work, and suffer, and endure. I think then I might be able to get at the deeper meanings of life, and to understand humanity and these things better than I do. Oh, I am so tired of living in this idle luxury."

Alfred Wyndham regarded his daughter's face

steadily for a few minutes, struck by the distress which was written there. Her eyes were fixed upon his face, wide and pleading, and her whole attitude was that of one who asks for some precious thing sorely longed for. He was more disturbed by that look than he cared to own.

"You ask what is impossible, my dear," he said, and the strong feeling of his heart gave a certain curtness to his tongue; "and, moreover, you don't know what you are talking about."

"Oh, why will everybody say that? I do know what I am talking about. I wish that I could find in this whole world someone who understood me, and to whom I could talk without being treated as a mere girl or an ignorant child who knows nothing."

"Listen to me, Joyce," he said presently. "What you ask is an impossibility. You want your mother and me to allow you to leave us, I suppose, and cast in your lot with those extraordinary people, who seem to have enlisted all your sympathies, to the exclusion of your own people, who might be supposed to have some little claim on you. You are our only daughter, your place is at home with your mother, and my counsel for you is to put away such foolish thoughts out of your head, and try and do the duty which lies nearest to you. That is my last word on

the subject, and don't let me hear any more of this foolish nonsense, or I shall certainly agree to your being packed off to your Aunt Grace next week."

CHAPTER X.

TOM IN THE BACKGROUND.

TOM WYNDHAM generally walked to and from business, passing on his way the block of buildings where the Thrales lived. He had got into the way of regarding the windows as he passed with an interest which would have surprised his mother could she have witnessed it. But as yet her mind was entirely at rest about her boy. Tom was indeed a good deal more interested in Hannah Thrale than anybody knew; he did not himself realise the depth and extent of that interest, although the day was at hand when his eyes were to be opened. Sometimes he was rewarded as he passed by a glimpse of Hannah's beautiful face at the window, and she never failed to give him a smile and a nod which sent a very odd and significant thrill through his big, honest heart. Hannah Thrale was absolutely free from coquetry or affectation of any kind. Many men had been attracted by her, and she could have made a good

match, from a worldly point of view, more than once, but she had as yet shown no disposition to change her estate, and had never given the slightest encouragement to suitor or lover.

About six o'clock on the day after Joyce had paid her visit to Hannah, there was a short, sharp thunderstorm, accompanied by a heavy rain, which, when its force was spent, settled into a dreary, wet drizzle which obscured the clearness of the summer air, and speedily rendered the pavements unpleasant to the feet. That night, however, Tom walked as usual, and when he came near to the block of buildings which had always a very special interest for him, he saw that the sitting-room window was wide open, and that Hannah sat just within the curtain, apparently enjoying the delightful freshness of the air which the rain had cooled. He was not a vain man, or it might have occurred to him that the girl was watching for him. He was conscious of nothing but the usual thrill of pleasure which the sight of her, even at that distance, never failed to cause him. When she saw him coming she stood up, and he felt his heart beating furiously when he gathered from her demeanour and expression that she wished to see him. Hastily lifting his hat, he crossed the street and ascended the stairs by leaps and bounds. He had never been

within the door of the house, and he could scarcely believe that he was now about to enter, but when he reached the landing the door was already open, and Hannah stood on the threshold.

"I hope you will excuse me," she said, with that bright, rare smile of hers which exceedingly beautified her face. "I know it is perfectly dreadful of me to watch for you, as I did to-night, and then to beckon you to come up, but I have something very particular to say to you. You do not mind, I hope?"

"Why should I mind?" said Tom, a trifle gruffly; "and you know quite well I am only too pleased to get the chance of coming in, and that I have often envied Joyce the privilege."

"I am sorry father has not come home yet; I should like you to see him," said Hannah simply, as she held open the door. "What I want to say to you won't take a minute. Joyce was here this afternoon."

By this time she had led the way into the sitting-room, which Tom entered with a curious look on his face which might have indicated a kind of reverent hesitation. It was interesting for him, of course, as it is for every man, to see the home and habitation of the woman he loves; not that Tom had yet admitted to himself that he loved Hannah Thrale; nevertheless it was the truth.

"There isn't anything very wonderful about that, is there?" he asked, attempting to speak lightly, because he was inwardly concerned.

"Well, no, but she came this afternoon on rather a particular errand," said Hannah. "Won't you sit down?"

Tom took the chair opposite to her, looking at her with a keen and earnest gaze, which might have disconcerted her had her mind not been entirely occupied with the subject she wished to discuss with him.

"I suppose you know that your mother was here last night?" she began.

"I heard something about it, but not very much. What then?" he asked.

"She did not approve of what she saw here," said Hannah then, "and she has been speaking to Joyce about it. I am afraid that it will make an end to our pleasant friendship. Haven't you any influence over Joyce?"

"Not much," answered Tom, shaking his head; "she is an awfully queer sort, you know, not like other girls. She always has been full of fads and fancies; but, upon my word, I can't think what my mother could have seen here to make her give you any such decision."

Hannah faintly smiled.

"I am inclined to agree with you; it is all so trivial, it isn't worth paying the slightest attention to; that is my frank opinion, though of course I don't feel called upon to say so to Mrs. Wyndham. But I do think that she exaggerates its possible effect upon Joyce. Couldn't you speak to your sister, and try and get her to give in a little?"

"It isn't any good," repeated Tom. "Joyce unfortunately regards me as a species of heathen, and has told me so more than once."

At this Hannah laughed outright. She had a very pleasant, musical laugh, never too loud or obtrusive; but presently her face grew quite grave again, graver than Tom Wyndham liked to see it. He had got so far that every passing change upon her face was interesting to him, which of course could have but one meaning.

"I sometimes wish that we had never met, Mr. Wyndham; I have only caused trouble in your family. I gathered from what Joyce said that your mother is very much vexed. She must be when she thinks it necessary to send her away to Paris."

"To Aunt Grace," added Tom, with a little expressive whistle. "Is she really going to do that? But I can't for the life of me understand what all the row is about."

It was a very characteristic speech. Tom had a

very hazy idea of the subjects which were of such engrossing interest to Joyce, and he was of opinion that his mother was needlessly concerned about her.

"Joyce tells me that her mother has forbidden her to be friendly any longer with me, and although I feel it very much, I think that she is quite right, looking at it from her particular point of view. I can't tell you how much I regret having allowed Joyce to meet certain people, and hear certain things in this house; it is all very well for those who are unattached, and have nobody who would be vexed or troubled about their views. With Joyce it is quite different, and I am sure that it is her duty to fall in with her mother's wishes. When I saw you coming, it occurred to me all of a sudden to ask you if you would not give Joyce a talking to, and see if you can't persuade her to try and make your mother happy. Good mothers are not so plentiful that we can afford to make them miserable. I think if my own were alive now, there is nothing on earth I would not do or give up for her sake."

The colour rose a little in her cheeks as she spoke those passionate words, and Tom Wyndham found it difficult to keep his eyes from her face, and also to control the expression of his own.

"We are going to move away from Camberwell Road," she said presently, when he made no reply,

"and then there will not be the same temptation for Joyce to run in here as she has always been in the habit of doing. We are always meeting, you see, whether we like it or not, and that makes it very difficult to break off."

"But do you want to break off?" asked Tom bluntly.

"It isn't a question of what I want," she answered, looking away from him through the open window to the steady drip, drip, of the rain through the evening air; "and I think it is Joyce's duty to try and make her mother happy, and to meet her wishes. It is duty, after all, that the best of us aim at, is it not? Won't you do what you can to make her see this?"

"I can speak to her if you like," said Tom; "but I don't believe myself that it is any use. But think how we shall all miss you up at Overton. When do you leave Camberwell, may I ask?"

"Oh, I don't know; our movements are very uncertain. My father may come in any evening and say we shall go to-morrow. Then I shall have to get up and go," said Hannah, with a quaint smile. "It does not matter much to me where I go, so long as I have him. I think I try to please him."

"I am sure you do," said Tom, with a great deal more fervour than the occasion seemed to warrant;

but somehow these simple words touched him, and he felt a great rush of pity towards the motherless girl who sat opposite to him, that pity which is akin to love. "Is it premature to ask where you are going? I hope not to some remote part of London where we shall never see you."

"It isn't quite settled yet; but I know that it will not be very far away," she answered, "although I think myself that it would be better if we could put the whole breadth of London between us. Perhaps if she never saw or heard anything about us, Joyce would forget more quickly."

"You believe that out of sight is out of mind?" said Tom suggestively.

"Oh, not always," she answered, and leaning forward to the open window, she held her hand out so that the rain-drops fell upon it. "I love the rain, don't you?" she said suddenly. "It is always so clean and so cool, and there can never be any mistake about its meaning; it is bidden refresh the earth, and does it without any more fuss or pretension. And look how my plants rejoice in it."

The quaint fancy seemed to please her, and a smile crept about the corners of her lips. Tom Wyndham thought he had never seen a more exquisitely beautiful face than the profile half turned

to him, with that half grave, half merry expression playing about the mouth.

"And do you mean to say if you go away to this place, wherever it may be," he said bluntly, 'you will never come to see us any more?"

"How can I?" she answered, without looking round. "If Mrs. Wyndham gives me to understand that she prefers the friendship between Joyce and me should cease, then whatever I may feel or wish I am bound to respect her desire."

"I don't see it," said Tom, inclined for the moment to share his sister's rebellion, but from a purely selfish motive.

"Oh, but I do," said Hannah calmly; "and I wish when you go home to-night you would tell your mother that you have seen me, and what I have said. If she would like to talk it over with me, I can go up to her, or she will find me here to-morrow afternoon between three and five. But just say to her—"

Here she paused for quite a minute, still holding her hand upon the sill, where the rain-drops splashed upon it.

"What shall I say, then?" he asked, a trifle impatiently, and wishing she would look round, so that he might see her eyes.

She drew in her hand, wiped it with her handkerchief, and turned round to him.

"Just say to her that I understand exactly what she feels and wishes, and that I will do the best I can."

"I think you are awfully good, then," said Tom Wyndham, his face flushing slightly as he rose to his feet.

Hannah looked at him with a secret approval. He looked very big and manly and honest, and his face was one which inspired trust. Had she been asked at that moment to give a candid opinion of Tom Wyndham, she would have replied without hesitation that he was a man she would journey to the world's end with without a single question or a doubt.

"And so all our cricket matches and drives and jolly times are at an end?" he said dolefully.

She looked up at him with a swift, amused glance.

"We have had one drive to one cricket match; perhaps that does constitute jolly times, but I agree with you in being sorry that it is over."

"But I don't see that it need be over, and it won't be if I can help it," said Tom stolidly.

Then Hannah Thrale began to feel slightly disturbed, she could not tell why; and she suddenly

thought that perhaps she had done an exceedingly foolish thing to invite this young man to come up that afternoon. She had done so, however, in all singleness of heart, acting upon the frank impulse of the moment, as was her nature and habit.

"Well, we need not say any more about it, need we?" she said, a trifle quickly. "You won't forget to tell your mother what I have said?"

"No, I will tell right enough; but while you are all talking over this matter, and settling it to your own satisfaction, don't forget that I am waiting in the background, and I have got to be reckoned with."

CHAPTER XI.

A LITTLE DINNER.

TOM WYNDHAM continued his walk up Denmark Hill in rather a confused frame of mind after the abrupt and significant speech which had been quite unpremeditated on his part. He had felt himself gently dismissed by Hannah Thrale; she had simply ignored his parting words, though they had caused rather a dull flush to spring to her cheeks. This flush conveyed to Tom a little message of hope, and he occupied himself as he walked through the gently falling rain with wondering how he could best help to remove the present uncomfortable state of affairs, hingeing upon Joyce's friendship with Hannah Thrale. He was rather given to seeing the comic side of things, a happy disposition which enabled him to extract a good deal more enjoyment from life than most people, and though he foresaw some trouble ahead if he persisted in his present resolve, he felt no small amusement at the idea of presenting to his mother a future daughter

in the person of Hannah Thrale. It had come to that with Tom, and though he was in no haste, he felt deep in his heart that if he could not make the girl he had just left his wife, he should never care for any other. Yet he had a great many pleasant acquaintances among the sisters of his numerous friends. Tom was, indeed, a general favourite by reason of his good nature, lovable disposition, and freedom from pretension or conceit of any kind.

By the time he had reached the gate of his father's house, he had made up his mind that he would have a serious talk with his mother that very night; but just then he saw a brougham drive away from the door, and remembered that his mother was having a small dinner party. Then the heinousness of his own offence in having loitered on the way banished everything else from his mind. The servants in the house grudged no service for Mr. Tom; he always repaid them with a smile and a pleasant word, and although Ada had been busier than usual, she had taken time to put his evening things all ready for him, for which the young man inwardly blessed her as he hastily dressed. This timely help enabled him to reach the drawing-room only five minutes late.

Mrs. Wyndham did not give large dinners, but rather prided herself upon the selectness of her

parties. There were six guests only that night: the vicar, the Rev. Louis Meynell, and his daughter Ursula; the family doctor and his only son, who was also his partner in practice; an old business friend of Mr. Wyndham's from Manchester, with his wife, completed the party, and Mrs. Wyndham flattered herself that they were very well chosen. She was not a scheming woman, but I suppose that all mothers do scheme a little in a harmless way for their children, and had the secrets of Letitia Wyndham's heart been laid bare that night, two desires would have been found there side by side. One was that her son, when he chose a wife, would let his choice fall upon sweet Ursula Meynell, and the other that Joyce might requite the devotion of Jack Ferrars; and certainly regarding these two couples as they sat side by side at Mrs. Wyndham's flower-laden table, it seemed the most natural and desirable thing in the world that they should be attracted to each other. Ferrars was Tom Wyndham's bosom friend, although he was his superior in intellectual gifts, and devoted to his profession; but they had been boys together at St. Paul's School, and had shared everything like brothers. There was a decided contrast between them. Ferrars was tall and slender, with a thoughtful, serious face and a pair of piercing dark eyes which

seemed to have the power of reading the very soul. He had always cared for Joyce, but had not yet asked her to be his wife, because Mrs. Wyndham had begged him to wait a year or two till Joyce should be able to discriminate and to understand the value of what was offered to her.

Tom looked very happy as he sat by the side of Ursula Meynell. She was a very pretty girl, with a fair, pink-and-white prettiness, and an abundance of soft hair which seemed to have caught the sunshine. They had known each other for years, and there was never any flagging of talk between them. Mrs. Wyndham watched them, well satisfied, and only wished that the other two appeared as well pleased with each other.

"You haven't been to the vicarage for ever so long, Mr. Tom," said Ursula, finding him, as she imagined, somewhat quieter than usual. "I suppose cricket represents the whole sum and substance of existence at present?"

"Well, that is about it," answered Tom; "but I will be up one of these evenings. You are always so much engaged with parish work, it is difficult to see you. Out every night, aren't you? Upon my word, it is just a kind of dissipation."

"Indeed, I often say that to papa," replied Ursula, looking up the table towards her father,

whose devoted daughter and helpmeet she was; "and he always replies that there is nothing like plenty of occupation for everybody. What is the matter with Joyce just now? She seems to me to look dreadfully worried—quite ill, in fact."

"As a matter of fact there has been a little worry about Joyce," said Tom, lowering his voice. "Haven't you heard anything about it?"

"No," answered Ursula, with interest. "What is it about? Has she been going to any more socialistic meetings lately?"

"That is what it has all been about," answered Tom confidentially. "Don't you think that the mother worries rather more than she need about it?"

"Well, I don't know," answered Ursula, as she twisted the curb bracelet on her white arm. "You see Joyce is not just like other girls; things take such hold upon her. Now I have listened to Hannah Thrale holding forth over and over again, and it never makes the slightest impression on me. But Joyce is different."

"You do not approve of Miss Thrale's views, then?"

"Oh, yes, I do, up to a certain point; but I don't think there is any good to be done by the kind of agitation they go in for—demonstrations in the

parks, and all that sort of thing. It only satisfies the vanity of the few who go to speechify there, and like to feel themselves the centre of interest. I rather think that Mrs. Wyndham and papa are talking about it just now."

Tom turned quickly towards the head of the table, but though he saw that his mother and the vicar were talking earnestly, they had lowered their voices so that no words were distinguishable at the lower end of the table.

"Papa likes the Thrales very much, and I think that Hannah is a splendid girl. I do admire her so much; don't you?" She lifted her innocent blue eyes frankly to her companion's face, but Tom kept his steadily fixed on his plate.

"I don't know," he answered, a trifle confusedly, though he inwardly blessed the sweet girl by his side for her frank approval.

"A lot of men don't like Hannah, I suppose, because she does not allow them to talk nonsense to her," said Ursula, with a little teasing smile. "Perhaps that has been your experience, Mr. Tom?"

"No, indeed; I thought you had a better opinion of me than that, Miss Meynell. I am not much given to talking nonsense to girls; in fact, I often envy those who can."

"Oh, well, you need not," replied Ursula quickly, "because I assure you that most girls do not like it in the least. I grant that there are some who do; but any sensible girl whose opinion is worth having will not thank you to make silly compliments to her, as so many men think it their duty to do."

"There are not many girls like you, though, Miss Meynell," said Tom, quite innocently and sincerely; but, though he meant nothing, the words sent a warm pink flush to the cheek of the girl beside him.

"I am always so sorry for Hannah Thrale," she said, with a tender note in her sweet voice; "she is so very lonely. You see she has no mother, and though her father is a fine old gentleman and devoted to her, of course, still she leads a very peculiar life."

"But it does not seem to have hurt her in any way," said Tom, with a kind of quick earnestness which rather struck Ursula Meynell.

"Oh, no; in fact, I believe that it is her environment which has largely made Hannah what she is. Perhaps if she had lived in a home like mine or yours she would have been much less interesting."

"You would not call her unwomanly or advanced, surely?" said Tom rather anxiously.

"Oh, no," answered Ursula, with a little laugh, "by no means, certainly not unwomanly. Advanced I should say she is, but not in any objectionable way. I should say that she is a woman with very strong opinions and plenty of courage to support them. I often wonder what kind of a career she will have. I should not think it at all likely that she will marry, should you?"

"I am sure I don't know," said Tom, his eyes again fixed steadily upon his plate. "What makes you think that?"

"Oh, nothing in particular, only I don't think she is much interested in that sort of thing. Where are you going for your holidays this year? Papa and I seriously contemplate a little voyage to the North; he does want a complete change so much, and I think if I could get him away where the echo of St. Saviour's bell would never sound in his ears, it would do him a world of good."

"You will not go to Felixstowe, then, this year?" asked Tom.

"No, indeed," she replied decidedly; "it is not far enough away. They kept sending for papa on every trivial pretext, and so this year I have put my foot down, and said that we shall have a complete holiday, 'far from the madding crowd.'"

"Then I do not suppose we will go to Felixstowe

either," answered Tom, "and I don't think I mind it much. It is rather a slow place. Did you hear that my mother wants to send Joyce away to Paris to Aunt Grace for six months?"

"No," replied Ursula, with quick interest; "that would be very pleasant for her, but I should think your mother will miss her dreadfully. When is she going to let poor Jack speak? Don't you think she might do a great deal worse than become Mrs. Ferrars?"

"Indeed I do," answered Tom, looking across the table with an appreciative smile to his friend. He responded with an answering smile, not knowing that he was the subject of their conversation. "Whoever marries Jack Ferrars, I can tell you, will be jolly well off. He is the prince of good fellows; I only wish I were a girl and had the chance."

"How enthusiastic a man always is about his friend when he has one such as you have in Jack Ferrars," said Ursula thoughtfully. "Do you think women are as single-minded and generous towards their friends?"

"Yes, I think so," replied Tom. "Just recall what you have been saying about Miss Thrale. I am sure no man could speak more warmly about his friend than you have done about her."

"Well, I meant every word of it," said Ursula. "Do you know I have a curious feeling about Hannah

Thrale ; I think she will suffer a great deal. I seem to see it in her face."

"Why should she suffer?" asked Tom briskly; "in what way?"

"Well, in her contact with the world. A woman with a strong and deep nature like hers is bound to suffer, she cannot escape ; but of course she will enjoy things more ; that is the compensation. I hope I shall always know her, and if I can help her when she is in trouble, I should like to do it, I think, more than anything in the world."

Years afterwards Tom Wyndham recalled these words to Ursula's remembrance, when she herself had forgotten the letter though not the spirit of them.

"There is your mother waiting to give us the signal. I have brought a new song to-night. Don't sit here prosing for an hour," she said, with a bright smile, as she rose from her chair. "If you are very good I will sing it for you when you come up."

CHAPTER XII.

HOPES AND FEARS.

JOYCE felt considerably out of sorts, and Jack Ferrars had seldom found her more disinclined for talk. He was not a man who possessed a large fund of small talk, and when he found his companion inclined to be silent, he also relapsed into silence. It disconcerted Mrs. Wyndham somewhat to observe how very quiet Joyce's part of the table became, and she felt a sense of irritation against the girl. It distressed her not a little; she wanted to live at peace always, and to have her family affairs go smoothly—no very extravagant desire, and yet one likely to be denied her.

When they went to the drawing-room she found an opportunity to whisper a quick word in her daughter's ear.

"Try and make yourself agreeable even if you do not feel so, and remember that you should be courteous to guests in your father's house."

Now Joyce did not feel at all discourteous; she was simply bored and occupied with her own thoughts.

In the present strained relations between her mother and herself, that quick word of reproof stung her to the quick, and she immediately went to the opposite extreme, talking incessantly and in an extremely silly manner, which was noted with surprise by the ladies present. It was a relief when the gentlemen came up; then Ursula Meynell went to the piano, and sang for them an old English ballad, to which she did ample justice. She had a very sweet, true voice, and was absolutely free from affectation or mannerism of any kind. Mrs. Wyndham, sitting in her chair, with a conventional expression on her face, regarded the girl at the piano with envy, comparing her sweet, womanly ways with Joyce's tantalising moods, and when she saw Tom hovering about the piano she magnified his simple courtesy into significant attention, and was well pleased thereby. Tom, at least, would never worry or disappoint her. Immediately the guests had gone, Joyce went off to bed, and while Mr. Wyndham retired to the dining-room to smoke his last pipe, Tom lingered a moment in the drawing-room with his mother.

"You look awfully tired, mother," he said affectionately. "Why will you give dinners in June? It is too hot for anything."

"But I don't think they felt it," she said quickly, anxious concern for the success of her little party

uppermost for the moment. "I am sure the dining-room was beautifully cool. That block of ice on the sideboard was a splendid idea. You didn't feel it too hot, did you?"

"Oh, no, I was all right; but I wish you would not look so frightfully worried, mother. Worry doesn't pay."

"Oh, I know that very well, and I haven't had much of it until lately, Tom," she answered. "Don't hurry down to your father for a minute. I want to talk to you."

She sat down on the sofa, fanning herself vigorously. Tom walked to the window and threw it open, and the sweet scent of the roses heavy with the night dew came in on the breath of the evening wind.

"Joyce didn't behave well to-night, Tom," she said quickly. "What do you suppose we are to do with her?"

"Leave her alone, I should say, mother," observed Tom cheerfully.

"But that is just exactly what we cannot do," said his mother perplexedly. "Nobody knows what she will say or do next if she is left quite alone. She must go to Aunt Grace."

"I shouldn't think it would do much good myself," said Tom, leaning up against the window. "You wouldn't mind if I lit a cigarette here, would you,

"You wouldn't mind if I lit a cigarette here, would you mother?"

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mother? It helps a fellow to talk common-sense, I think."

"All right, light it," said his mother quickly. 'Didn't Ursula look sweet to-night?"

"Yes; I don't know a jollier nor a more sensible girl than Ursula Meynell," said Tom heartily enough. "She is an out and out good friend. I saw you comparing her with Joyce; but you know, mother, you must not be quite so hard on Joyce. She isn't so old as Ursula, for one thing, and then she has never had her responsibility. There is nothing like responsibility, you know, for sobering anybody down."

"Ah, but Joyce has not Ursula's sweet disposition. I am horribly anxious about her," said Mrs. Wyndham, with a great sigh. "I don't think I shall know any peace of mind until she goes away to Paris."

"But will you know any after she is there, mother?" asked Tom bluntly. "I should like to know what it is you are all afraid of. I must say, if you will excuse my speaking so frankly, that I think you are alarmed about a very simple matter."

"You were not at that meeting, Tom," said his mother quickly. "I had no idea how much Joyce was really contaminated until the talk I had with her this afternoon."

"Contaminated?" echoed Tom bluntly. "Oh, that is surely rather a strong word, mother."

"Well, she has revolted against my authority altogether, my dear. I assure you she flatly refused to give up her acquaintance with Miss Thrale, and said I had no business to ask such a sacrifice from her."

Tom took two or three puffs at his cigarette, keeping his face steadily turned out towards the garden, where the moonlight lay white and soft upon the lawn. He felt himself in rather an awkward corner; feeling as he did towards Hannah Thrale, it was difficult for him to listen unmoved to his mother's strictures upon her. The impulse was upon him for the moment to lay bare his own secret, and to cast himself upon his mother's loving-kindness. But a second glance at her worried and troubled face decided him to hold his tongue, for the present at least.

"I can't help thinking it is a bit rough on Joyce, mother," he said at length. "You see you have allowed them to be friendly so long, and they have got to be fond of each other. Just put yourself in Joyce's place. How would you like it? I know I shouldn't, if you were to step in and tell me I must have nothing more to do with Ferrars, for instance. It would cut me up a bit rough, I can tell you."

"Ah, but that is different," responded his mother

quickly. "Nobody could take the slightest exception to Jack Ferrars. I only wish—"

"Yes, mother, I know what you wish. You would like to see Joyce marry Jack Ferrars, and I believe you would not mind if I were to go in for Ursula Meynell."

Mrs. Wyndham faintly laughed.

"Well, I should certainly feel then that my troubles were at an end, and Jack is very fond of Joyce."

"Yes, he is," assented Tom, "and I must say that whoever marries Jack Ferrars will be a lucky woman."

"And the man who marries Ursula will be a lucky man?" his mother hazarded.

Tom nodded slowly.

"Agreed; Ursula deserves the best that can be got, and I hope she will get it."

His mother looked up at him anxiously, admiring the tall, well-built figure leaning against the open window, and the honest, kindly face, which was the index to a heart both tender and true.

"Then you are not thinking of Ursula?" she said, a little wistfully. "It would make us all very happy. I know that Mr. Meynell would not object."

Tom shook his head.

"No, mother, I like Ursula awfully; I really think

she is about the nicest girl I know; but I don't think I could marry her."

"Why not?" his mother asked quickly. "I am sure she is pretty, and ladylike, and clever, and good."

"Oh, yes, I know she is all that, but I am not in love with her, I suppose," said Tom, with rather a conscious laugh, "and, after all, that is the main thing."

"Perhaps it may come yet," his mother said hopefully.

"I shouldn't think it likely," observed Tom. "You see, I have known Ursula all my life, and I have never felt like that to her, and I am sure she would not care about me in that way either. We are very good friends; I hope you won't do anything to spoil our friendship, mother."

"Oh, no, I shouldn't think of that," his mother answered, in rather a sad voice, for Tom had destroyed one of her most fondly cherished hopes, and she was observant enough to know that his answer was final. "Well, I hope you won't go and do anything foolish to vex your father's heart and mine," she said quickly. "Joyce is enough on our hands at present. We had better go downstairs to the dining-room."

"And have you really forbidden Joyce's acquaint-

ance with Miss Thrale?" asked Tom, trying to speak indifferently, although his voice had a good deal of earnestness in it.

"I have told her that I disapprove of the intimacy, but Joyce flatly declined to give her up."

"But do you think that Joyce has got any harm from her?" asked Tom, a little indignantly.

"Oh, no; I have always liked Miss Thrale. There is something very sweet about her; but you know they have a very objectionable set of acquaintances, and it is impossible for Joyce to visit at their house without coming into contact with them. There is nothing I dread more than Joyce becoming imbued with all these horrid notions about freedom and emancipation, which are ruining the young women of the day. I have been most careful myself in my teaching and example, and Joyce is the kind of girl who goes so thoroughly into everything, that, if she takes up this objectionable fad, there is no knowing where it may end."

Tom listened in silence to these words, which gave forth no uncertain sound. Any lingering desire he had had to confide the inmost secret of his heart to his mother was quenched for the time being, but he went to bed that night with a heavy heart. He was honestly and tenderly attached to his parents, and would not willingly grieve them, and yet his heart

turned so passionately to Hannah Thrale that he could not face the idea of giving her up.

Next morning, as he walked down the road to business, he met Jack Ferrars, who had been out making an early visit.

"Hallo, Tom!" he cried cheerily, "you look very glum this morning. Indigestion, eh?"

"No; never have anything of that sort, thank goodness. I shall keep out of the clutches of you and your kind as long as I can help it," Tom answered back, as he shook hands warmly with his friend. "You are early on the trot. Have you been up half the night?"

"Oh, no, just called as I was sitting down to breakfast, and I am jolly hungry now. All well at Overton this morning?"

"Oh, yes, all well; but things are rather at sixes and sevens in our place just now. Has the mater said anything to you about Joyce lately?"

"No," answered Ferrars, and the quick look of inquiry on his face betrayed his keen interest.

"Then I'd better keep quiet," answered Tom; "but she is going off to Paris next week to live for six months with Aunt Grace."

"For six months?" exclaimed Ferrars. "What on earth is the meaning of that? I never heard of

anything so odd. Your sister seemed well enough last night."

"Oh, she is well enough in her health; it is her mind, the mater would tell you," answered Tom, with an enigmatical smile. "It is all about the Thrales. You know them, down in Camberwell Road? My mother wants Joyce to break with them, and Joyce won't—a case of the revolting daughter."

"Oh," said Ferrars, and there was a good deal expressed in that monosyllable. "When did you say she was going?"

"Monday, I believe, or Tuesday."

"For six months?"

Tom nodded.

"Oh," said Ferrars again. "Well, I must be off."

Tom smiled as he turned away.

"Jack will put a spoke in the wheel," he said to himself, "before he is many hours older, or I am much mistaken."

CHAPTER XIII.

ANOTHER DISAPPOINTMENT.

JACK FERRARS made a very poor breakfast that morning. His father, who had breakfasted alone and who was busy with his newspaper, did not notice anything amiss, although it occurred to him that his son was a trifle less talkative than usual. The old doctor and the young were very good friends, and though many pitied them because of their lack of women-folk, they were very happy together, and entirely united regarding their work, in which both took the interest of enthusiasts. Old Doctor Ferrars had built up his practice himself, and could point to his large connection proudly as his life-work. It was no small joy to him that his one son had not only been willing but eager to follow in his footsteps. The old man had remained faithful to the memory of his boy's mother, and though it had occurred to him from time to time that, in all probability, Jack would marry one day,

he had always put it from him as rather an uncomfortable thought, because he knew that such an event would put an end to the close comradeship between them. Of late years he had been much comforted by observing his son's demeanour towards women; beyond being interested in them as patients, he did not seem to concern himself much about them. Joyce Wyndham was the very last woman that Mr. Ferrars would have thought of as a likely wife for his son. A man is apt to regard a girl at whose birth he has assisted as a very young person indeed; and old Doctor Ferrars had never awakened to the fact that Joyce was now a grown-up young lady, eligible for matrimony any day.

Breakfast over, Jack and his father made out their visiting-list for the day, and then parted, each going his separate way. About two o'clock, having finished his rounds, Jack stopped his victoria at the gate of Overton Hall, and sent it home. Then he walked with a firm, rather determined step towards the house. His face was very grave, and he looked like a man who had something on his mind. He expected to find Mrs. Wyndham at home, and she was much surprised at receiving a visit from him at that hour of the day.

"I hope there is nothing wrong," she said anxiously, as she shook hands, "and that your father

is none the worse for his dinner last night? He seemed to enjoy it."

"He did, indeed," answered Jack, smiling to reassure her, "and is as jolly as possible to-day. No, I have come to pay a visit to you on my own account, if you are not too busy to listen to me for a few minutes."

"I am never too busy to speak to you, Jack," Mrs. Wyndham answered quickly, and she meant what she said.

"I saw Tom this morning as he went down to business," began the young doctor, in his usual straightforward manner. "What is all this about Joyce being sent to Paris?"

Mrs. Wyndham's face flushed.

"Oh, did he tell you? Well, Mr. Wyndham and I have come to the conclusion that it will be a good thing for Joyce to be away from home for some little time. Did Tom tell you the reason which has caused us to come to this decision?"

"Well, he did say something. He said, I believe, that it was on account of the Thrales. But surely you do not anticipate for a moment that the Thrales could do Joyce any harm?"

"That is exactly what Tom says," said Mrs. Wyndham; "but I think I may be permitted to know better than either you or he what is right and

best for Joyce. You know what extraordinary people they associate with, don't you?"

"Oh, I have heard talk of it, of course," answered Ferrars lightly; "but, I assure you, Osborne Thrale is a very fine old chap, and a perfect gentleman, just as his daughter is a thorough gentlewoman."

"Then you would not disapprove of Joyce's friendship with her?"

"Not with her, certainly," answered Ferrars at once. "Not that I have any business to have an opinion on the matter; but I rather think that my errand here to-day, Mrs. Wyndham, is to ask whether you would have any objection to according me a special interest in Joyce's welfare."

Mrs. Wyndham's face flushed again, and she waited just a moment, not sure what his words might imply.

"I have always cared for Joyce, I think, since I knew her a little girl in pinafores," said Ferrars simply; "and when Tom told me to-day that she was going away for so long, I seemed to get all at once a clear view of my own mind. Would you have any objection to me as a son-in-law?"

"Objection?" cried Mrs. Wyndham, and her eyes filled with tears. "I should give Joyce to you with a thankful heart, and thank God for His goodness to me and mine."

"Then I have your permission to speak to Joyce, and Mr. Wyndham's also?"

"Oh, yes, but I am just afraid," she said doubtfully. "Have you any idea how Joyce feels towards you? She is such a strange child, and, although I am her mother, I don't think I understand her in the least, and I certainly have not the key to the secrets of her heart."

Ferrars shook his head.

"I haven't the slightest idea, but I can only hope that she will not refuse me. When could I see her? This is Thursday, and Tom told me that you had actually decided to send her away on Monday. I should like, if you would allow me, to speak to her before she goes."

"Ah, but if Joyce would make us all happy by accepting you, Jack, then she need not go," cried Mrs. Wyndham. "I do hope that she will not be so foolish as to throw away such a prize."

Ferrars laughed, somewhat embarrassed.

"Come now, Mrs. Wyndham, don't talk like that. I believe I am a fairly decent chap, and I will do my best to make happy the woman who honours me by becoming my wife. I mean Joyce, of course, because, if she refuses, no other woman shall ever have the chance."

"I hope she will not refuse you," repeated Mrs.

Wyndham fervently, and she felt at the moment that she could almost have gone down on her knees to Joyce to beg her acceptance of the good gift about to be offered to her.

"Well, I shall look in this evening, after dinner, and if you will allow me a few minutes' private talk with Joyce, I shall be much obliged," said Ferrars, as he rose. "I should prefer that you do not say anything to her in the interval. Of course, you understand that I don't want any pressure brought to bear upon her. My wife must come to me of her own free will or not at all."

"I won't say anything," Mrs. Wyndham answered. "She will not be home till almost dinner-time; I believe she has gone to Clapham to spend the day."

"Very well, then, I shall look in between eight and nine. Good-bye just now."

"Does your father know what you have in your mind, Jack?" she asked, as she accompanied him to the door.

"I don't think he has any inkling of it yet," replied Jack, with a slight smile. "It will be time enough to tell him when Joyce accepts me. I daresay you understand, Mrs. Wyndham, that my marriage will be, in a manner, a blow to my father whenever it happens, though he should himself choose

the wife. You see we have been chums and all in all to each other so long that the old man will naturally feel it a good deal."

"Yes; but a good woman who would be a devoted daughter to him would increase his happiness as well as yours, I should think," she said earnestly.

"That I could very well believe, and I have heard him say that if there were more wives and mothers like you, matrimony would not be the problem it so often is."

He spoke the words sincerely and unaffectedly, without the slightest suspicion of flattery or compliment-paying, and they fell very sweetly upon the ears of the woman who heard them. In middle life we are able to appreciate such words at their full value; it is only the young, upon whom they are so richly lavished, that pass them lightly by.

Joyce arrived home that evening only in time for dinner, and they had scarcely risen from the table when Dr. Ferrars was announced. Mrs. Wyndham went to the drawing-room with him for a moment, and then came to find Joyce.

"What is all this mystery about, mother?" Joyce asked, as she came out of the dining-room. "Why can't Jack come in as he always does, without any ceremony? Is it a professional visit?"

"No, my dear, he wants to talk to you. Go into

the drawing-room now and hear what he has to say."

"Dear me, that is very funny," said Joyce carelessly; and without a moment's serious thought, she crossed the hall and entered the long drawing-room, which was only lit by the glow of one standard lamp under its soft yellow shade.

"What do you want to talk to me about, Jack?" she said unconcernedly. "Couldn't we go out into the garden? It will be just as well; the house is so fearfully stuffy, I think, in this weather."

"Perhaps we may go out into the garden afterwards, Joyce," he answered, and he felt his heart beat as he looked upon the slender, graceful figure in the soft white gown. Joyce always wore white of an evening; it was a fancy of her father's.

"It is a very mysterious proceeding this, isn't it?" she asked, looking up at him with a slightly mocking smile. She hadn't the slightest idea of what was passing in his mind, but as she looked at him, something in his eyes made her a trifle uncomfortable.

"I hear you are going away to Paris next week," he said, rather lamely, for there was nothing in the girl's matter-of-fact expression to encourage him to go on without some preliminary remark.

Joyce shrugged her shoulders.

"So they say; but I am not gone yet. Are you in the conspiracy, too?"

"I didn't know there was any conspiracy," he answered. "All I know is that I hope you won't go just yet, and I came to-night to ask you to stay."

"But what have you got to do with it?" she asked, in a slightly puzzled voice. "Has mother enlisted you on the enemy's side, or what do you mean?"

"Haven't you the slightest idea, Joyce?"

"No, I don't think I have," she said slowly. "I am waiting to be enlightened."

Again she felt that vague sense of discomfort as she met his very earnest gaze.

"I daresay it is my fault that you have not guessed my feelings long ago, Joyce," he said hurriedly. "I hope I have not waited too long; but you see I have always thought of you as a very young person indeed, and I seem to have awakened all at once to the fact that you are quite grown up. I have always cared for you, and I have come to ask you if you will be my wife."

Joyce looked startled, and then an expression of very real distress came upon her face.

"Oh, Jack Ferrars, what a shame of you to come like this, and stop all our friendship, for I have liked you so much and depended on you as a friend, and now I suppose it is all at an end."

"Not necessarily," said Ferrars quickly, though his heart sank. "It is sometimes possible, I believe, for husband and wife to be friends. I hope that you will not send me away, Joyce. I am very much in earnest. You know that I am not one who can lightly come and lightly go in a matter of this kind. I have never felt the slightest interest in any girl except you, and I love you very dearly."

"Oh, I am so sorry," cried Joyce, clasping her hands. "I didn't know—I hadn't the slightest idea. Oh, I hope that I haven't led you to think or imagine that I cared for you in that way. You see I have always known you, and so I thought I was safe to say anything to you. I feel just as I do to Tom, for instance."

"Don't say that," interrupted Ferrars quickly. "It is like giving a stone to a man who asks for bread."

"But it is true," cried Joyce, and her face grew very soft and tender in its expression as she saw the look on his. "I like you better than anybody in the world except father and mother and Tom, but not in that way."

"And do you think you never will?"

"Oh, I am sure I never shall," she answered fervently. "You see it would be just like trying to fall in love with one's brother. That is the

difficulty with people who have always known each other as you and I have."

"I suppose so," he answered, with a sigh. "Well, if I am to take this as final, I hope that we may still be friends, and that you will try and forget what I have said."

He took his refusal manfully in the quiet way characteristic of him, but nevertheless he had got a severe blow. He only realised during the bitter minutes between Overton and his own home how he had built his hopes upon Joyce Wyndham, and what her refusal meant to him. Fortunately there was some work waiting for him when he got in, and it was late when he returned home. He was not surprised to find his father sitting up as usual for him. As they smoked their last pipe together, the old man noticed the cloud on his son's face.

"Anything specially worrying you, Jack?" he asked affectionately. "I haven't heard you say you have a very bad case on."

"No, I haven't, except my own," he replied, with a faint, dry smile, and the next moment the yearning for some human sympathy banished his former prudence to the winds. "I think it right to tell you, dad," he said, looking him straight in the face, "that I have tried my luck to-day with Joyce Wyndham, and she has refused me. So it is un-

likely that I shall ever marry now, and we can be chums together to the end."

The old doctor sat up in his chair, and looked across at his son, almost stupefied by surprise.

"Refused you, has she?" he said, after a long pause. "Well, the loss is hers. Never mind, my boy, there is nothing like time for healing these wounds. Aye, the loss is hers." He got up and took his son's hand in a warm, close grip, and they looked into each other's eyes with a look which brought them nearer together than they had been since the days when Jack was a little chap, and used to ride on his father's shoulder. "Aye, the loss is hers," repeated the old man to himself, as he went upstairs an hour later, with his candle in his hand. But he could not sleep that night for thinking of the disappointment which he saw had wrung his son's heart.

CHAPTER XIV.

IN HYDE PARK.

WHEN Mrs. Wyndham heard the outer door close behind Dr. Jack after the very short interview between him and Joyce, she guessed how it was. When Joyce dismissed her lover, she came calmly out of the drawing-room in search of her mother. She knew perfectly well that her answer to Jack Ferrars would be a very bitter blow to her mother, and she felt that the sooner they understood each other the better. Before she left the drawing-room she stood for a moment before the open window, and let the cool night wind blow on her hot face. She had a strange, unreal feeling, as if she were looking on at some drama being played out by others. It was unfortunate, she told herself, that Jack Ferrars' proposal should have come in the very midst of her strained relations with her mother. It helped to complicate matters very much. As she passed through the hall she met her mother coming out of the morning-room, looking anxious and a little wistful.

She stood for a moment before the open window. [*Page* 148.

"I thought I heard the front door. Jack has not gone already, has he, Joyce?" she said quickly.

"Yes, mother," Joyce answered calmly, "he has gone."

"Which means, I suppose, that you have refused him?" said her mother, with a hard, bitter note in her voice.

"We need not discuss the matter in the hall, mother," answered Joyce quickly, and turned back to the drawing-room.

Mrs. Wyndham was too bitterly disappointed to be able to hide her feelings.

"I feared that in your present mood Jack had no chance," she began at once. "But oh, Joyce, I hope you have considered the matter well. Any woman might be happy and proud to be Jack Ferrars' wife; there are not very many like him."

"I like him very much, mother," answered Joyce, very quietly "and I wish for your sake, and for everybody's sake, that I could have said yes to him; but I don't care for him in that way, and I never shall."

"You speak very decidedly, Joyce, for one so young," her mother observed. "Did you not say that perhaps if he would wait you might be able to answer him differently?"

"No," answered Joyce promptly, "because I am confident I never should. I know it is a disappointment to you, mother, and I hope you will believe that I don't willingly inflict it; but I am sure you would be the very last to advise me to marry a man for whom I did not care."

"Well, but are you sure you know your own mind? So many girls are headstrong. If your father and I were to search the whole of London, we could never find a man to whom we should more willingly give our only daughter than Jack Ferrars; he is simply everything we could desire."

"Oh, yes, I know," answered Joyce quickly, but not impatiently, for she sympathised with her mother up to a certain point; and her heart was gentle and soft with the memory of the look on Jack's face when she had given him her decisive answer.

Mrs. Wyndham looked at her perplexedly, her fair face betraying the deep anxiety consuming her. There was nothing soft and yielding in the girl's attitude and look as she stood leaning up against the open French window, with her hands clasped before her, looking out into the night. But her face was a trifle sad.

"Mother, I wish I had been born different," she said suddenly. "It must be so nice to be able to fall

in with everything, and make everybody happy. I would give ten years of my life if I could."

"But, dear, are you quite sure of your feelings about Jack Ferrars? You have always been so fond of him."

"That is just it, mother," interrupted Joyce quickly. "I know him too well; I feel to him just as I feel to Tom. It is a mistake for a man to be so brotherly to a girl if he wants to marry her."

"I hope," said Mrs. Wyndham, in a low, anxious voice, "that there is no one else."

"No, mother," answered Joyce promptly; "only I don't think that I shall marry."

"Your father will be very much disappointed. He has looked upon your marriage with Jack Ferrars almost as a settled thing. Upon my word, I could wish that we lived in France, where girls have to do as they are bid."

Joyce's lip curled, and her gentler mood passed.

"I don't think, if we are to believe Aunt Grace and the girls, that the results of that particular form of domestic management are conspicuously successful," she said. "Really, girls are made to marry men they don't care anything about, and they simply go their own way after marriage, and the reason French girls fall in so readily with their parents' wishes is because they know that marriage will bring them

complete emancipation. Here, you see, it is just the opposite. When you are married you are bound hand and foot."

"But it is a happy bondage, you will admit that," cried Mrs. Wyndham. "Who could be happier than I am with your father?"

"Oh, no one," answered Joyce readily; "but then papa and you always cared for each other. Perhaps I had better go away to Aunt Grace with all possible speed, because I seem to be doing the wrong thing always."

Mrs. Wyndham sighed, and made no immediate reply. She felt that she and her daughter were thoroughly out of tune, and as there seemed no possible chance of their agreeing on any subject, she felt that the sooner Joyce left home for a time the better it would be for all concerned.

Next day was Sunday, and while her father and mother took their usual after-dinner nap, Joyce dressed herself carefully and left the house without saying to anyone where she was going. She had always plenty of pocket-money, thanks to her father's generosity, and when she got without the gates she hailed a passing hansom, and told the man to drive her to the Marble Arch. It was a beautiful and sunny afternoon, with a light westerly breeze blowing, to relieve the air of its midsummer sultriness. The

recent rain had refreshed the grass, and washed clean the trees and shrubs. As Joyce entered the park with the throng, and caught its fresh beauty, two lines from an old hymn she had learned in her childhood ran persistently in her ears:

> "Where every prospect pleases,
> And only man is vile."

The park was crowded with the usual well-dressed Sunday throng, augmented by a great gathering of people from the poorer quarters, who had assembled to aid in the special demonstrations organised by the Socialists for that special afternoon.

Joyce had never before seen such a gathering. She could see the banners wave above the platform but the crowd was so dense that she felt it would be impossible to approach near enough to be recognised by any of her friends. She was not at all nervous or excited by a crowd, and was able to look with intelligent interest on the great multitude, who mostly looked smiling and contented, as if they had come out for some pleasant outing, rather than to take part in a protest against the existing state of things. She pressed as far into the crowd as she thought was safe, but could scarcely hear a word of what was said by an artisan, dressed in his working garb, who stood on the nearest platform. His

remarks seemed to be approved, however, by those who could hear, for when he ceased, the applause was hearty and prolonged. Immediately afterwards Osborne Thrale rose to speak. Joyce never forgot the picture the old man made, nor the contrast he presented to the great mass of those about him, standing with his noble figure, and his fine, clear-cut features showing like a cameo against the waving background of the trees. She longed to be near in order that she might hear the words which fell from his lips. She was standing on tiptoe, stretching forward to try and catch his words, when someone touched her arm, and she turned hastily to meet the earnest eyes of Philip Dane.

"I caught a glimpse of you a minute or two ago," he said quickly. "You would like to get forward, would you not, to hear? If you will kindly take my arm, I will do my best to get you through the crowd."

Joyce hesitated a moment, thinking of her mother, and then laid her hand obediently on Philip Dane's arm. There was something at once entreating and commanding in his look and manner, and she thought of nothing at the moment but the joy of being near him. After some little delay, Joyce found herself quite close to the platform, where she recognised several people whom she had seen from time to time

at the house of the Thrales. But Hannah she did not see. She sat down on the lower edge of the platform, and presently found herself shaking hands with Mrs. Hemming, who looked much interested and pleased to see her.

"I am so glad to see that you have the courage of your convictions, my dear," she said heartily, "and I am sure our dear Hannah would be pleased also. She has not come to-day, unfortunately having a bad headache."

"Oh, I am sorry to hear that," said Joyce quickly. "I don't think I should have come had I not expected to see her here."

"But you are not alone; you see we have a good many women present." Mrs. Hemming never used the word lady. It was one of her favourite remarks that the word which had been so much abused, and which had become so little significant of real gentlehood, ought to be banished from the vocabulary of truthful and earnest-minded people. "How did you ever get leave to come here?" asked Mrs. Hemming, more interested for the moment in Joyce's sudden appearance than in the impassioned words which were being spoken on the platform above her. "I understood that your father and mother were very much opposed to your taking any active part in our interesting movement."

"They don't know I have come," answered Joyce promptly; "but I promised I would some day, and as I expect I shall be going away to Paris on Monday, I thought this would be my only opportunity. Pray, Mrs. Hemming, who is that poor lad in the invalid chair?"

"That, my dear, is Bobbie Dane, our good Philip's brother, and an enthusiast in the cause. Just look at his face while he listens to Mr. Thrale. Is it not eloquent?"

"Indeed it is," said Joyce quickly. "It was the eyes which drew me. He is not at all like his brother."

"Not in looks, perhaps, but he has the same enthusiastic soul. We have lost one of our most powerful advocates in Bobbie Dane. Had he only possessed his brother's health and strength, he would have been one of our prophets."

"He has a beautiful face," observed Joyce, looking at him with a keenness of interest she could not hide. Philip Dane saw that look, noted the sweet compassion in her eyes and the exquisite tenderness about her mouth, and his heart went out to her in a passionate rush of gratitude and love.

"Come, tell me, my dear, why it is that you are being banished to France," said Mrs. Hemming, with interest. "I hope you can regard me as a

friend, because Hannah has told me a great deal about you, and I am a woman who has seen and suffered a great deal. Perhaps out of my experience I may be able to help you a little in this crisis of your life."

Joyce turned and looked at her with a sudden, eager, yearning look. Something in that strong, sad face moved her, and she wished for the moment that they had been in some less public and crowded place, so that she might have poured out her heart to one whom she felt would understand her even better than Hannah. Of late, indeed, Hannah had not been to Joyce the friend of yore.

"Oh, I wish I could tell you," she cried impulsively. "Everything seems to be going wrong; it culminated last night when I had an offer of marriage from a man whom my parents are extremely anxious I should marry, and I don't care for him. It is very hard to go against the wishes of parents, Mrs. Hemming, especially when they are good and kind as mine are."

"I quite understand the position," said Mrs. Hemming, "and as you say, it is a great deal more difficult to stand up for one's rights when they are threatened so gently and lovingly. But this is not quite the place to discuss such private matters. Could you not come and see me in my little home,

where we could have a long talk? I am interested in you, my dear; my only child, had she lived, would have been just your age."

"Oh, I should love to come if I may," said Joyce eagerly, feeling that she would do so at any cost.

"We can arrange it before we part to-day," said Mrs. Hemming. "Now Philip Dane is going to speak, and he is always worth listening to."

CHAPTER XV.

THE QUARREL UNDER THE ELM TREE.

JOYCE turned round quickly, full of eager interest to hear what Philip Dane had to say. That he was a favourite was evident by the pleased interest visible on every countenance, and that his sentiments were approved of was shown by the frequent applause which interrupted his remarks. He spoke upon the great labour question moderately and sensibly, Joyce thought, although many who listened thought his views extreme. His frank, honest, noble face, impassioned manner, and winning voice, all told, and the party were right in looking upon him as one of their most promising members. Many strange thoughts chased each other through Joyce Wyndham's excited brain; as she listened to the glowing and eloquent words, a great sense of the injustice and inequality of things oppressed her, accompanied by a passionate longing to be able to do something towards ameliorating the condition of things manifestly so much in need of redress. Her

face became flushed with the depth and intensity of her feeling, and her eyes shone. Mrs. Hemming watched her intently, finding her a much more interesting study than the question under discussion. She beheld in her a kindred soul burning to redress the wrongs of the world, and became imbued with a strong desire to make her one of themselves.

Philip Dane did not look much, if at all, at Joyce while he spoke, but he was never for a moment unconscious of her presence, and when he stepped down amid ringing applause from the platform, it was to her he turned, eager to see whether he could gather from her face that she approved of what he had said. She met his glance somewhat timidly, but he failed to read the expression on her face. She was feeling herself far beneath him, scorning herself for her scanty knowledge of the various points with which he had so eloquently dealt, and was almost afraid to speak to him, lest in speaking she should betray her ignorance.

"Bravo, Philip," said Mrs. Hemming heartily. "I think you surpassed yourself, and the mantle of our leader has fallen upon you."

"Hush!" he said, a trifle sharply. "I only felt how inadequately I was dealing with it. May I ask what you thought, Miss Wyndham?"

"Oh, I thought it was splendid — perfectly

splendid," said Joyce, in a low, eager voice, and yet with a slight sigh. "Only I fear I did not follow you quite. I am so very ignorant; you see, I want to know and understand everything. Do you think I shall ever understand it all?"

"None of us will ever reach that point, I am afraid," he made answer. "But you have no lack of keen perception, and I should think that with a little study of the question you would soon get far ahead of most of us."

"I quite agree with you, Philip," said Mrs. Hemming quickly. "I have been watching her while you spoke, and she has enthusiasm enough to come to the front. I am just trying to arrange a little visit she is to pay to me, when we shall talk things over. Perhaps, if we arrange it for the evening, you might be able to join our little party. I can also invite Mr. Thrale and Hannah."

"I shall be very glad," said Dane; but he did not speak with the alacrity which might have been expected. He glanced from the sternly-marked face of Olivia Hemming to Joyce's frank, open, girlish one, and there was a deep significance in his eye. He admired Olivia Hemming for many things, and would have been the first to grant her usefulness as a friend of the cause; but he would have kept Joyce and her apart. Someone claimed his attention

just then, and, when he turned away from them, Mrs. Hemming took up the thread again.

"Then when can you come? I have rather a busy week; but I think I am free on Tuesday evening. Could you come on Tuesday evening about six o'clock?"

"I should like to. I shall try," Joyce murmured.

"You know where I live, do you not?"

"I think I have heard that you live very near Mr. Dane."

"Yes, I live in the same building, on the floor beneath him. There is my card, and I shall expect you about six o'clock on Tuesday evening."

"I will come if I can," answered Joyce, as she slipped the card into her pocket. "Now I am afraid I must go home. They will wonder where I have been, and tea will be over when I get back."

"Shall you tell them?" asked Mrs. Hemming significantly.

Joyce coloured slightly.

"If they ask me, of course I must," she replied. "Do you think I am afraid?"

Mrs. Hemming gave her shoulders a little expressive shrug.

"I should not think you would be afraid of much;

but I can conceive from what I have heard that the circumstances might be a little trying. But remember, my dear, that every cause demands from its devotees a certain amount of suffering. I hope that we number you among the friends of the cause?"

"Yes, I think so," answered Joyce, but with a slight hesitation. She had, indeed, but a vague idea of what the speaker meant.

Mrs. Hemming's eyes were quick to read her hesitation correctly.

"I see that you are wondering what it is all about," she said good-humouredly. "Perhaps it will help you if I sum it up in a word or two. We fight for humanity and freedom; do you understand?"

"Yes, I do; at least, I hope I do," said Joyce, with a faint smile. "But I shall let you see the extent of my knowledge, perhaps, on Tuesday night, if I may be allowed to come. Good-bye."

She shook hands hastily, and without waiting for another word with Philip Dane. It was now almost five o'clock, and she began to realise that she had done rather a serious thing as regarded from the stand-point of her father and mother. She was not exactly afraid as the hansom bore her rapidly through the busy throng of Oxford Street, but she felt that the struggle was likely to become more sharp and bitter, and there was a vague wonder in

her mind as to how it would end. It was almost half-past five when the hansom drew up on the road outside her father's gates. The thick shade of the trees and the distance from the house prevented her arrival from being observed, and when she entered the grounds she saw them gathered, as usual, for tea under the thick elm tree on the lawn. Her father and brother were enjoying their cigars; her mother sat in a basket-chair with her face towards the house, so that Joyce could not see her expression. She had gone half way across the lawn before she was observed.

"Hallo! here is the truant," cried Tom. "Well Miss Muffit, where have you been? We have had serious thoughts of sending the bellman round in search of you."

Joyce made no answer, but walked calmly over to the little circle, and seated herself in her chair.

"Where have you been, Joyce?" her mother asked quietly, laying her book on her lap, and regarding her with straight scrutiny.

"I have been at Hyde Park," she replied quietly, beginning to remove her gloves.

"Alone?" asked her mother shortly.

"Yes; I went and came in a hansom."

Tom gave an expressive whistle.

"Independent young woman! Anything on

there? You might have given yours truly a chance to see the fun."

"There is a demonstration there this afternoon on the labour question," she replied, "and I wanted to hear what they had to say."

All this time Mr. Wyndham had been regarding his daughter gravely, and had never spoken a word. He now sat up, and the expression on his face indicated that he was much annoyed.

"Hyde Park, on Sunday afternoon, in such a rowdy crowd, is no place for any modest girl to go alone," he said sharply. "Why didn't you tell us you wished to see what kind of foolishness goes on there? Your brother or I would have taken you. I suppose it is nothing to you that your mother has been worrying about you for the last two hours."

"I never thought about it," Joyce answered candidly; "but why should she worry? I am quite able to take care of myself, and I don't think you ought to say, father, that no modest girl would walk in Hyde Park by herself on Sunday afternoon. I saw hundreds there. It is as safe as it is in this garden."

"That is all you know about it," said Mr. Wyndham, more crossly than Joyce had ever heard him speak before. "My dear," he said, turning to his wife, "why don't you rate her soundly, and tell her

we have had enough of this silly nonsense, and that it must come to an end?"

"I have had my say, Alfred," Mrs. Wyndham replied, in a low voice, "and Joyce has paid no heed to it. Perhaps she will listen to you."

Joyce Wyndham had been an indulged and idolised daughter all her life, living in an atmosphere of sunshine and approval, and her nature was quick to resent any strictures being placed upon her conduct. The slow colour burned in her cheeks, and her eyes became ominously bright.

"You do not approve of her escapade this afternoon, I suppose?" said Mr. Wyndham, a trifle irritably. It was hard that his peaceful Sunday afternoon, so hardly earned, and which he always spent quietly in the bosom of his family, should thus be rudely spoiled. Besides, he was now somewhat seriously concerned about his daughter.

"No, I don't approve of it," replied Mrs. Wyndham coldly; "but I have had my say, and I will leave you to deal with her now. I suppose you went there with your friends the Thrales?" she said bluntly, fixing her eyes on Joyce's changing face.

"No, I didn't; I went and came alone," she answered. "Hannah wasn't there, and I only saw her father in the distance speaking on the platform."

"Well, I hope you heard something that edified you," put in Tom, anxious to relieve the tension of the moment. "I must say, any time I have stopped to listen to any of them haranguing in the park, I have always thought what rubbish it was, and wondered how anybody could waste their time listening to them."

"That is all you know about it," retorted Joyce, looking at him from under her veiled lids with a fine quick scorn.

"Perhaps so," said Tom meekly; "but I know a good many people who are of the same mind. You don't happen to be the centre of all the wisdom in the world, Miss Muffit."

Joyce liked Tom's scathing sarcasm even less than the displeasure of her father and mother.

"They are people in earnest, anyhow," she said bitterly; "and they do think sometimes of something a little higher than kicking a ball from one part of the Common to the other."

"Well, there is no use saying any more about it," put in Mr. Wyndham quickly; "but understand this, Joyce, that the next time I hear of your playing us a trick of this kind, I shall take summary measures to put an end to it. However, as you are going away to your aunt's on Tuesday, there will be no more of it."

"I haven't said I am going," said Joyce sullenly.

"No, but I have said it—I and your mother together," observed Mr. Wyndham quietly. He was a very good-tempered and gentle-mannered person as a rule, but somehow that afternoon Joyce succeeded in raising a very bitter anger in him, the root of which, of course, was his deep love and intense anxiety for an idolised child; but to its true meaning in the meantime Joyce's eyes were holden.

"You are getting her things ready, aren't you mother?" he said suddenly, turning to his wife.

"They don't want getting ready; she has plenty of things to take with her," answered Mrs. Wyndham, in a low voice, which had rather a hopeless ring in it. Looking at Joyce's forbidding face, she felt that the struggle was unequal, and that somehow in dealing with her daughter she had missed the way.

"Well, the sooner you get them ready the better. I believe I shall go and wire to Grace that she will be over to-morrow night instead of Tuesday morning."

"I am not a chattel to be disposed of so summarily without consulting me," cried Joyce angrily, "and I am not going."

"Oh, draw it mild, Joyce," said Tom, now thoroughly uncomfortable. Family jars of a serious nature had hitherto been so rare in this peaceful and

happy house that one such as this made everyone miserable.

"It is all very well for you," said Joyce quickly and eagerly. "Nobody says what you shall do or shall not do; you come in and go out as you like, and nobody asks any questions, simply because you are a man, I suppose. Why shouldn't I have the same right? I will have it, too," she cried, giving her foot a little passionate stamp.

"You can go into the house, my girl," said Mr. Wyndham drily, but in a manner that said a good deal more, "and you can stop there till you come to a better frame of mind."

Joyce started from her chair, and marched towards the house with her head in the air. Mrs. Wyndham dropped her head on the arm of her chair, and burst into tears.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE UNEXPECTED GUEST.

MRS. HEMMING sat in her small sitting-room, enjoying her frugal supper, that Sunday evening between nine and ten. It was oppressively hot, and although the window was wide open, the air which came up from the busy Clerkenwell Road was neither sweet nor refreshing. That congested thoroughfare had its usual Sunday evening throng, orderly for the most part, and every car and omnibus was crowded to its utmost limit. She was thinking, as she sat at the open window, of Joyce Wyndham. Something in the girl's frank, earnest face had touched her heart, awakening there the yearning of motherhood which she had thought buried in her one child's grave. Her life was lonely, but she never suffered herself to be dull or to brood too much over her position. She filled her days with busy concern for other people, interesting herself in almost every public question. In some quarters she was indeed more feared than beloved, yet she was far from being happy ; her eyes had a restless gleam in their depths

and her mouth in its repose was unutterably sad. There were few to whom Olivia Hemming revealed her inner self, which was the true woman after all.

Her reverie was interrupted, shortly before ten o'clock, by a short, quick, eager tap at her door. She would not have been surprised at a visit from Philip Dane, who often looked in on his way up to his own rooms; but she knew it was not his knock, and wondered who could want her at such an hour. She lighted a taper and turned on the gas in the dark little hall before she opened the outer door, so that she was able at once to recognise the figure that stood without.

"Miss Wyndham!" she exclaimed, in great astonishment. "What can you possibly want here at this hour?"

"May I come in?" Joyce said hurriedly, "and I will try to explain."

"Certainly, my dear. I hope that I have not made you feel that you are unwelcome; but naturally I am surprised to see you here so late."

She held the door wide open and motioned Joyce in, securely shutting it behind her. Then she led the way into the sitting-room, where she hastily lit the gas and drew down the blind, wishing to have a full view of the girl's face while she listened to the explanation of this unlooked-for visit.

"I forget whether I told you that I was to be banished to Paris to-morrow," began Joyce hurriedly. "If I didn't tell you, perhaps Hannah did, and after what they said to me this afternoon about my having gone to the meeting, I thought I had better take a step on my own account."

"And you have run away, I suppose?" said Mrs. Hemming, and Joyce could not gather either approval or disapproval from her face.

"I suppose it amounts to that," she said, with a little nervous laugh. "What could I do? I am not a mere child to be sent out of the country because I happened to misbehave, looking at it from one particular point of view. I simply want to make a protest against this interference with my personal liberty."

"How old are you, may I ask?" was Mrs. Hemming's next question.

"I am nineteen; I shall be twenty before Christmas," said Joyce bravely. "Surely if a woman is ever to know her own mind, she ought to know it now."

"Oh, yes, I grant you that. Well, sit down, my dear, and let us talk this thing quietly over. I expect I am a bit taken aback; it is rather a serious step for you to take."

"I thought you would approve of it," said Joyce,

with a quick note of disappointment in her voice. "You were so very kind and sympathetic to me this afternoon, that my first impulse, of course, was to come to you."

"But why not to Hannah, Miss Wyndham? You have known her so long."

"Hannah would have sent me back at once," said Joyce, with a slight, bitter smile. "I cannot understand Hannah of late; she seems to have changed so completely. I am sure her heart is not in the cause as it used to be."

"I am not sure but that in this question she would have acted rightly," said Mrs. Hemming slowly, "and I think that I shall take you back myself."

Joyce sat down, and her face wore a look of great determination.

"If you will not allow me to remain here, then of course I must seek accommodation somewhere else," she said quietly. "I am not going home; never again, until conditions are altered. They must get a lesson, and be made to understand that they cannot do with me exactly as they like."

Mrs. Hemming leaned her elbow on the mantelshelf, and turned her thoughtful face towards Joyce. She was an advocate for personal liberty and for individual rights, and had herself suffered acutely

in her struggle to obtain them. She was constantly bewailing the fact that the lack of courage among women as a body accounted for the many disabilities under which they laboured. But though she had acted perhaps foolishly in the past herself, she was a woman of the world, who could look things squarely in the face, and she was not so completely carried away by enthusiasm for the cause that she could not realise the seriousness of the step which Joyce Wyndham had taken.

"I admire your courage and your strength," she said presently; "but do you think you quite realise what you have done? Let us put it into plain words. You have deliberately left your father's house and cut yourself off from your family, for what object, may I ask?"

"So that I may take up some work in the world, I hope," Joyce replied readily. "If I had stayed there they would never have allowed me any more liberty. I want to see and understand life as it really exists; I could do something towards helping the suffering of the needful."

"It is a fine idea," said Mrs. Hemming shortly. "I remember well when I was imbued with a like enthusiasm. Far be it from me to seek to quench it in you, or to throw cold water upon your high resolves; experience winnows out the wheat from the

chaff, so time will show what it is you really long for. It is all very well to hold such noble ideals; but, unfortunately, there are other things in this world besides the ideal. There is the real and the actual, which has to be reckoned with every day. From what I have heard of your parents from Hannah Thrale, I should imagine that if you once offend them they will be inexorable. How, then, do you propose—to descend to the primary question—how do you propose to get bread to eat?"

"I can work, I suppose," said Joyce. "I am young and strong; surely there is something I can do which will be worth a few shillings a week to some employer of labour."

Mrs. Hemming faintly smiled.

"I could laugh at your innocence if it did not sadden me too much," she said. "I daresay, as you say, something might be found for you to do; but come, tell me, did you give your parents any hint of your intention to-night?"

"I wrote a letter to them when they were at evening church," she answered, "in which I have tried to explain why I have left. But it will not give them any clue as to my whereabouts."

"They will go at once, of course, to Mr. Thrale's house," put in Mrs. Hemming. "They do not know, I suppose, that you have come here?"

"Oh, no; if I had called there I should never have been allowed to go any further. I feel confident that Hannah would have forced me to go back."

"It is possible she may seek you here, however," suggested Mrs. Hemming. "I think it likely that, directly your father and mother return from church, they would set out on their quest, and we may expect them here shortly."

"They may come if they like," said Joyce stoutly, "but I shall not go back with them, unless, indeed, you turn me out."

"I should not do that," said Mrs. Hemming, with great good-humour. "I am not all sure that I approve, remember, of the step you have taken—of its worldly wisdom, at least; but I like your eager, ardent spirit, and I think there may be a work for you to do here or elsewhere. You are welcome to stay here as long as it seems suitable to you."

"I will not be a burden upon you," cried Joyce. "I shall only ask to stay until I have found some more suitable place, and something definite to do; and I can pay," she said, fumbling nervously in her pocket for her purse, from which she turned a little heap of gold into her lap. "You need not look at me so suspiciously," she exclaimed quickly; "it is my own money, given to me by my father at various

times. He has always been lavish with me, and I have not spent it; surely it is my own."

"Certainly," said Mrs. Hemming.

"Then why do you look at me with that expression on your face, as if you inwardly disapproved of me and my action?"

"I don't disapprove of it; but I once had a little child, and I was wondering how I should feel to-night if she were alive, and should act to me as you are now doing towards your parents."

"Oh, you would never seek to keep a daughter of yours within such narrow bounds, nor would you wish to make her marry against her will."

"No, that I should not," cried Mrs. Hemming, with great emphasis. "That was the curse of my life, being forced into marriage which I did not desire, and which was quite unsuited to my age and to my character. I have more sympathy with you now than I have had. Listen, and I will tell you a story."

Joyce felt an inward qualm as she listened to these words; her conscience reminded her that she was presenting a highly-coloured picture of her case; but she was so eager to strengthen her own position that she had almost convinced herself that she was being forced to accept the man whom her parents had chosen for her.

CHAPTER XVII.

BEHIND THE VEIL.

"I WAS an only daughter like you," began Mrs. Hemming, "only I had no brother. My father was a clergyman, the incumbent of a wretched living in the Salt Marshes, where the stipend was so small that it could scarcely keep body and soul together. My father and mother were an ill-assorted couple, who ought never to have been married, and I had a miserable childhood in every sense of the word. I was always a grave, studious child, fond of books and of thinking over matters more suited to persons much older than myself. Perhaps it was the nature of my environment which caused me, from my earliest years, to have a passionate interest in, and sympathy with, the down-trodden and the oppressed. My father, though he was in holy orders, was a bully and tyrant, and the way he treated my poor mother used to make my blood boil; and I grew up with a very low opinion of men, and looked forward to a day when I should show them that

there was one woman, at least, who would not be at their beck and call. My father was a great student, and, for his means and position, had a very considerable library, to which I had access, although he had not the slightest idea of the extent and nature of my reading. I read everything—philosophy, history, travel, theology—and out of that ill-digested mass there arose a great many convictions, strong, original; but many of them, as I have since proved, quite erroneous. I had no one to guide my taste, or to help me to understand and discriminate in my reading. My head was full of knowledge, which, by reason of its confused and one-sided nature, was likely to do me much more harm than good; and it did. I was considered very pretty in my youth, though looking at me now I daresay you would find it hard to believe. Although in the remote village where we lived there were few to pay me any attention, still I had my admirers, and among them was the man who ultimately, through the coercion of my parents, became my husband. He was the squire of our village, and the patron of the living, and was, of course, considerably older than I was. He was a widower, and had one son, who, however, had been abroad so long, that no one remembered having seen him. This man, between fifty and sixty, wished me, a young girl

not out of her teens, to become his wife. And my father was so delighted at the idea of his daughter becoming the great lady of the parish, that he simply informed me that the marriage was to take place, in much the same way as he might have told me to go an errand for him to the village. It would take me too long to tell you of the protracted struggle I made against the siege which from the beginning was hopeless for me. I was strong in some ways, but I was very young, and the pressure brought to bear upon me was so great, that though I very often contemplated taking some such step as you have taken, though with much less cause, I suffered myself to be overruled by those who were supposed to have my best interests at heart, and I married to please them. I will not burden you with details of my married life; it was absolute, hopeless misery from the very first. I hated the man, who was totally unfitted to make any woman happy, much less a young girl in whom the beauty and the nobleness of life was cherished as I cherished it then. To obtain some relief from the degradation and misery of my surroundings, I began to occupy myself more completely with the questions and social problems of the day. This, of course, gave mortal and dire offence to my husband, who belonged to the old order, and held very strong

opinions as to the subordinate position of working people. We lived in the most bitter strife, consequent upon my continuing to write, and occasionally to speak upon these questions with all the force and eloquence of which I was capable. It was an outlet for my miserable, crushed, and aching heart. Soon, almost immediately after my marriage, I left off attending church, which was another thorn in the flesh of my husband and my parents. It seemed to me such awful mockery. My brief experience of life had taught me that the professing Christians were more the servants of Satan than those who professed nothing. Some of the people who had been kind to me were without the pale of the Church, and I gradually lost my faith in things human and divine. Then my little child was born; for a time she filled my hungry heart, and gave me some sweeter thoughts, some kindlier feelings, even towards those against whom I had previously felt so bitter. She was spared to me for only two years, and at her death I found it impossible to continue any longer under my husband's roof. I had never liked or respected him; the closeness of the tie which bound me to him had turned my toleration into the most bitter aversion, and I felt I could no longer respect myself and remain. So I took my life in my hands, knowing what position the world

assigns to the woman who has the courage to dare and suffer for her own opinions. That is fifteen years ago. I have had a long, hard struggle; many a time I have been without bread to eat, but somehow the way has been opened up to me even in my most desperate straits; and through the most bitter privations of my lonely life there has crept back to me a little of the belief with which I, as a child playing in the orchards and the fields, used to look up to the blue sky and feel that nothing very bad could happen to me or to anybody so long as God was behind that blue canopy."

She stopped suddenly, and began to walk to and fro the narrow little room, and Joyce, listening breathlessly, saw that she was overcome by the depth of her own strong feeling.

"I am a woman whom few understand, and not many love. I do not wear my heart on my sleeve. Even to Hannah Thrale, whom I have known and loved for years, I have never told as much as I have to-night told to you. I think, my dear, that you are on the right side; it is time that women rose up to demand something of the freedom of thought and action which their brothers claim as their right. During these long, lonely years I have met many women who have suffered in the struggle, and some have died rather than allow the ordering of their

lives to lie in the hands of others. But though I agree with you in the main, and although I believe that you are actuated by a high motive, I would seek to advise you as I would have advised my own lost darling had she been spared to me. It seems to me that your particular fight with fate is not so bitter but that it may yet end in peace. Your parents, unlike my own, have laid you under a debt of gratitude for many years of loving care and kindness. If you ever live to have little children of your own, you will understand what they feel to-night."

The truth of these words, so quietly and impressively spoken, went home to Joyce Wyndham's heart; but she tried to shake off the misgivings which began to assail her. Having taken the decisive step and put her hand to the plough, she must not yet turn back.

"You will stay here to-night, at all events," said Mrs. Hemming, observing the girl closely, and drawing her own conclusions from her changing face, "and we shall see what to-morrow brings. I have a very small establishment, as you will see; but, fortunately, I can give you a little corner to yourself."

"I feel that I am intruding upon you," said Joyce, with difficulty, for her welcome was less warm than she had anticipated, "and yet I must accept your hospitality for this one night at least."

"You are more than welcome to it, my dear," said Mrs. Hemming quickly. "If I have seemed less cordial to you than you expected, it is explained by the strong sense of responsibility I feel towards you. I have lived longer than you, and it may be that experience has made my vision clearer. Meanwhile, I cannot quite approve the decisive step you have taken; but should it prove final you will have no reason to complain of my lack of interest in you, and sympathy with you. Now I am going to send you to bed, for I see that you are very tired, and I myself will be glad to rest."

"I am not tired," answered Joyce hastily, "and I am quite sure that I shall not be able to sleep."

"But you look tired, and I must not keep you up. Come and see your new quarters, then," said the elder woman, motioning Joyce to follow her.

Off the little narrow passage two small bedrooms opened; both were neat and clean, but plainly furnished, bare, indeed, compared with the room which Joyce had left in her father's house. She had her own luxuriously furnished bedroom and sitting-room adjoining, where she was allowed her own taste in decoration and arrangement, and which were filled with beautiful things—gifts made to her from time to time by those whom she had requited so ill.

It was not until Mrs. Hemming had bidden her good-night and left her alone that the contrast struck her sharply. She sat down on the edge of the little bed, and tried to realise where she was and what she had done. It was now past eleven o'clock ; she had never been so late out of her father's house without escort in her life, and a feeling of helplessness stole over her, not unmingled with a vague dread of something—she knew not what. Afraid to face long the companionship of her own whirling thoughts, she made haste to open the small bag she had brought with her, and take from thence the few necessary personal things that it contained. Nothing was to be got by sitting there brooding over the step she had taken. Mrs. Hemming's parting advice to get to bed quickly and go to sleep seemed the most timely just at that moment. Contrary to her expectation, before her head had lain long on the pillow she was fast asleep. She was young and strong and healthy, and as yet had encountered no experience bitter or absorbing enough to rob her of that heritage of youth—sound and dreamless sleep. She was quite unaware that shortly after having seen her unexpected guest to her own room Mrs. Hemming quietly stole out of the house, locking the door behind her, and quickly ran up to the flat above, occupied by Philip Dane and his brother. It chimed

the half hour after eleven as she tapped quickly at the door. Dane had not yet gone to bed. He was, as a matter of fact, preparing the breakfast he was to carry with him in the early morning, and though he was surprised at the knock, he recognised it, and came at once to see what his neighbour wanted.

"I am awfully late," she whispered, stepping within the door the moment he opened it; "but I have got something to tell you. Is Bobbie asleep? I don't want to disturb him."

"Sound asleep," answered Dane, with a nod, "and it will take something more than ordinary talking to disturb him. What has happened?"

"Something which will astonish you very much, I think," she said quickly. "I have got an unexpected guest downstairs—that friend of Hannah's, Joyce Wyndham."

Philip started, and the colour mounted high in his face. Fortunately, however, in the semi-dusk of the room where they talked, Mrs. Hemming did not notice it.

"What does she want?" he asked blankly.

"She has run away, revolted, in the most orthodox fashion," said Mrs. Hemming, with a curious, dry smile. "I have just been giving her a proper good talking-to. Silly girl, not to know when she is well off! Were I her father and mother, I should leave

her severely alone for the next six months. What do you think I ought to do?"

"Why, take her back in the morning," he said quickly. "There is nothing else you can do."

"I am not so sure about that," she said, with a somewhat shrewd smile. "I think it would do her a world of good to be allowed a taste of life as it is in certain quarters. Were she my daughter, she should be allowed the luxury of earning her own bread, as she so anxiously desires. I think I am safe in predicting that six months will work a permanent cure."

Dane answered nothing. He was, indeed, so much surprised and bewildered, he found it difficult to realise the truth of what he had been told.

"I think I shall go down now and write a few lines to her mother; I can have it posted before midnight, and she will get it in the morning. It will at least relieve her anxiety; but I thought I'd like to run up and tell you. Queer, isn't it? One does come across a few odd experiences in one's lifetime. Good-night. Tell Bobbie I shall come up and see him in the morning after you are gone."

So saying, she returned to her own room to perform the kind act which had naturally suggested itself to her. She wrote a few characteristic lines to Mrs. Wyndham, and five minutes before midnight carried it herself down to the pillar-box at the other

side of the street. Then she went to bed, and, not having anything particular to worry her, she also fell asleep.

In the flat above Philip Dane sought sleep in vain. He had never been so disturbed in his life as he was by the knowledge that Joyce Wyndham had taken the rash and foolish step of leaving her father's house, ignorant of all such a step involved.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE SERPENT'S TOOTH.

AT the supper table at Overton Hall they waited in vain for Joyce, and at last Mrs. Wyndham rang hastily, and bade Ada go up to her room and tell her she was keeping the meal waiting.

"Cook says Miss Joyce is out, ma'am," the girl answered. "She met her in the Camberwell Road as she came up carrying a bag; and when she saw cook she took a hansom."

The father and mother and son looked at one another in consternation. Then Mrs. Wyndham got up suddenly, and ran up to Joyce's room, in the faint hope that there she might find some explanation of this extraordinary proceeding; and there, in the true orthodox fashion, lay the note on the dressing-table of the missing girl. It did not contain very many words, but they left the mother in no doubt as to her daughter's intention to leave them.

"DEAR FATHER AND MOTHER,"—it said—"I hope

you will forgive me for taking this step. I feel that I cannot fall in with your wishes and go to Paris to-morrow as you have arranged, so I have gone away to a friend—a lady who will help me to get something to do, and to make a better use of my life. I feel that I am acting perhaps ungratefully and selfishly towards you, but something urges me to this step. I want to see and to know what life is in a way which I can never do here. I thank you very much for all you have done and given to me, and I hope that when I have made a career for myself you will forgive me enough to let me come back and see you sometimes. I wish I could have done and been all you wish, but I cannot help feeling as I do; I suppose I was born so. I may just say that I am not going to Hannah Thrale, and you need not inquire for me there; she would not approve of what I am doing, and knows nothing about it. Please try to forgive and think kindly of

"Your affectionate

"JOYCE."

With this letter open in her hand Mrs. Wyndham marched downstairs, and laid it on the table without a word. Her husband read it through, and then, before she could prevent him, tore it up into small fragments and threw it into the waste-paper basket.

"Tom, you must be both son and daughter to us now, my boy," he said, with a slight unsteadiness in his voice. "Your sister has cast us off."

"Oh, but she will come back, dad," said Tom cheerfully, though his honest face wore a look of deep concern. "Where has she gone?"

"She does not say, except that it is to a lady, save the mark, who will help her to a career. Now, mother, listen to me." He turned to his wife, whose face was white as the delicate lace on her cap, and taking no heed of the anxious look in her eyes, spoke thus, with stern decision: "She has made her bed, and she shall lie on it. We have lavished and spent our all upon her, and this is how she has repaid us. We have given her bread, and she has chosen the husks; let her feed on them until, like the prodigal of old, she begins to think longingly of her father's house. I forbid you to seek her out, or to bring her back. Do you hear, Letitia?"

"I hear, Alfred," his wife answered, but her voice had a far-away ring in it as if her thoughts scarcely followed him.

"When she has had enough of her career, as she calls it, we shall see her face fast enough, and then she will maybe find out that parents are not made to be used as footballs by their ungrateful

offspring. Tom, if you should see her outside, I forbid you to speak to her. She has cast us off; the least we can do is to follow her example."

Tom gave a great gulp, and hastily ran out of the room. His mother sat down by the table, and, folding her arms on it, dropped her head down in silence. She was crushed to the earth, and could not even weep.

"I wish you would say something, Letitia; it would do me good to hear you storm and rage a bit at the ungrateful minx," cried Alfred Wyndham, unable to bear the strain a moment longer.

"Oh, Alfred," she said, with a moan, "do you remember how proud we were of our little girl, and how sweet she looked that day I short-coated her; it was in June, do you remember? And she had a sweet little sunbonnet on when I brought her to meet you at the gate, and you said that she was just like a June rosebud."

"Better if she had died in her sunbonnet days," said Alfred, with something like a groan. "Perhaps we were too much set up when she was born, Letitia. It may be that we have made an idol of her; but God knows that if we have fallen short we are punished for it to-night."

Then they sat down together, the father and mother, upon whom age was creeping slowly, and

who needed the comfort their children ought to have been to them, and tried to talk the matter over calmly, and to decide what should be done for the best. It never occurred to them, curiously enough, to go forth in search of her at once, and the outcome of their talk was a decision to leave her in the meantime and let her have a taste of the experience for which she had so fervently craved. What it cost them to come to this decision no one knew, but amidst all their deep love and affection for her there was a feeling of outraged pride which helped them. Neither slept that night, and in the intervals of their talk, each prayed mutely and fervently that good might yet come out of what seemed such a bitter evil. Prayer was the sure anchor of that simple-hearted and devoted pair. They believed that God knew of their trouble, and had even permitted it for some wise purpose of His own. That absolute belief alone saved them from despair.

Next morning, when Mrs. Wyndham entered the dining-room, she found Olivia Hemming's hastily penned note on her plate. She did not recognise the bold, characteristic handwriting, and opened it with but a mild curiosity, not expecting that it would relate in any way to Joyce. These words, written by a solitary and often misjudged woman

out of the fulness of her heart, seemed to Letitia Wyndham a direct answer to the prayers with which she had charged the silent watches of the night.

"DEAR MADAM,—I write this to let you know that your daughter is under my roof. My name, I believe, is not unknown to you since you were at the meeting in Mr. Thrale's house, where I spoke. She is at present full of a mistaken enthusiasm, which, however, I think it would be unwise to check. My advice to you is to let her remain here in the meantime. She talks of seeking to earn her own living: if she does it will be under my guidance and supervision. I have seen a good deal of the unrestful and discontented spirit which makes unhappy so many girls of her age, and my experience has taught me that if allowed a certain freedom of thought and action in such a crisis in their lives the cure is usually speedily worked. My advice to you, therefore, is to leave her alone, and not to seek the slightest communication with her, or let her see even that you are anxious about her. I will take care of her for the sake of my only child, whom I buried in her babyhood. I can write, or, if you prefer it, come to see you from time to time. Meanwhile I am,

"Yours with sincere sympathy,

"OLIVIA HEMMING."

When Alfred Wyndham entered the dining-room, he saw his wife perusing this letter, with a strange light on her face, and when she passed it to him her hand and her lips were trembling.

"Read that, Alfred; I pray God to forgive me for the harshness of my judgment. That is one of His servants, although she may call herself by a different name."

Two tears rolled down Wyndham's cheeks as he read the words which Olivia Hemming had written straight from the heart, and when Tom presently entered the room he saw that something unusual had occurred.

"Well, what are you going to do this morning?" he asked quickly. "Shall I go down to the Thrales and inquire if they really don't know anything about her?"

"No, my boy; we have had some news, good news. So far your sister is in safe keeping, and there in the meantime she will remain."

They did not show him the letter, nor communicate its contents to him; but after he had gone away to business they sat down to read it again together, and to talk it over, and between them they concocted the reply which Mrs. Hemming received by the afternoon post.

Tom was late for business that morning, and, in-

stead of walking as usual, took the car. As it passed by the block of buildings where the Thrales lived, he saw Hannah watering her flowers, and although he had been told it was no use to inquire there for Joyce, he got down with great speed and ran up to the door. Hannah, occupied with her flowers, did not see him leave the car, and was therefore much astonished when the little maid showed him suddenly into the sitting-room.

"Good-morning, Mr. Wyndham," she said gravely, and not with her usual cordiality. "You are a very early visitor. I am sorry my father is not up yet, He did a good deal of speaking in the Park yesterday, and it tried him very much. He is not so vigorous, of course, as he was."

She spoke rapidly and appeared to be anxious to hide a certain embarrassment which was most unusual in her. But Tom was too much absorbed by the sad matter for which he had come to observe anything in her demeanour. He was for the moment entirely free from any personal thought.

"An awful thing has happened at our house," he said suddenly. "Joyce has run away."

"Run away?" exclaimed Hannah, and there was no mistaking the frankness of her surprise.

"Fact," he said, with a nod. "Last night when we were in church, ran off carrying a bag, and left

a note in the orthodox fashion; says she has gone to seek a career. I needn't ask if you know anything about it?"

"No indeed, nothing. I heard from my father that she was at the Park yesterday afternoon, but I was not there, as I had a headache; but I understood him to say that she did not stop long, and that she drove away home in a hansom."

"Oh, she came home right enough at tea time or a little later. It was when we were in church that she went off. Have you any idea where she can have gone?"

Hannah shook her head.

"I know of only one person to whom she might have gone, and I can go up and see her this morning. What a mistake she has made!"

"I am glad you think that," said Tom, with hearty relief, "because I think that she has behaved abominably to the poor old dad and mother. They have simply adored her too much, I think; they have been a jolly sight too good to us both all along."

"There is no fear of your serving them like that," said Hannah, with a sudden sweet smile which seemed to break like a ray of sunshine on the gloom of Tom's soul.

"No, not if I know it. I will do my honest

duty by them as I ought to do, out of gratitude for their kindness. Besides, I am too fond of them ever to do anything to vex them seriously. I can't make Joyce out, can you?"

"I think I understand her a little," said Hannah; "but I must say I never expected her to take such an extreme step; but it won't last. She will soon be convinced of the mistake she has made, and will probably be home to-day or to-morrow at the latest."

Tom shook his head.

"She may want to come, but I question very much if she will be allowed. You know how it is with people who have been good and long-suffering for years, and then something happens which sours them, as it were. I rather think that is how it is with father and mother now where Joyce is concerned. I hope you will excuse my coming up; I didn't think of it until I saw you at the window, and I thought it just possible that perhaps you might know something about it."

"I only wish I did," answered Hannah; "but I will find out, if there is anything to find out, before the day is much older."

She went with him to the door again, and they shook hands cordially, but in a matter-of-fact fashion. Hannah felt grateful that their meeting

had been so matter-of-fact throughout, and she honoured Tom Wyndham in her inmost heart for his honest, true-hearted, and loving consideration for the father and mother who had given him such a happy home, and made him what he was.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE NEXT MORNING.

NEXT day Joyce had quite recovered from the depression caused by Mrs. Hemming's plain speech of the previous evening. She awoke with a start, confused for the moment, and unable to recollect where she was. The next moment, however, it all flashed upon her, and sitting up in bed, she looked round the little plain room where she had slept soundly all night long, and realised that she had set out upon her career. There was something about the situation which pleased her, and when a vision of her parents anxious faces rose up before her, she hastily banished it, and sprang up to prepare for what a new day might have in store for her. She was about half dressed when a knock came to the door, and Mrs. Hemming opened it. She wore a very scanty and unbecoming morning gown, almost entirely covered by a huge cooking apron of the aggressive hue known as butcher's blue. At another time her grotesque

appearance must certainly have amused Joyce Wyndham; but she was in the mood to take everything seriously.

"Well, my dear, and how have you slept?" said her hostess brightly. "I hope I haven't disturbed you with my household operations. Monday morning I generally give my living rooms a good switch out, which lasts all the week. I see your eyes growing round with astonishment. That is one of the joys of the emancipated; none of us can afford to pay anybody to do our daily drudgery for us, so we either do it ourselves or leave it undone. I prefer the former."

Joyce looked intensely interested. This was living in earnest.

"Why didn't you awaken me, and I should have helped? I ought to have been up to earn my breakfast. If you don't let me help you in every way, I shall feel that I am only a guest whom you regard as a kind of curiosity. I want you to take me seriously."

"Oh, so I shall, so I shall," said Mrs. Hemming, with the greatest good-humour. "So you slept soundly, did you? I am glad of it, for I hardly expected it. It is not quite such a secluded locality as Denmark Hill. I thought it particularly noisy this morning, perhaps because I kept thinking of you.

We have rather more market carts than usual on Monday morning."

"I never heard them," answered Joyce frankly. "Can I do anything now?" she asked, as she put the finishing touch to the silk tie above her dainty cambric blouse. "I think I could get breakfast if you would allow me."

"Oh, it is ready," said Mrs. Hemming; "a very frugal meal, I assure you. I cook on a little gas stove to save work and time. I lived a little time abroad, and I got used to their simple coffee and rolls. Can you breakfast on coffee and rolls?"

"I will try," said Joyce. "In this new sense of freedom everything seems fresh and delightful."

Mrs. Hemming smiled a slight, inscrutable smile, and led the way to the little kitchen, where a simple breakfast was laid on the table at the window. She had made no difference in her morning habit for her strange guest. She wanted the girl to see everything in its true light, and get some idea of what she might expect.

"And what do you propose to do to-day?" she asked, as she poured the coffee from the plain brown jug, which must have presented to Joyce's eyes a great contrast to the dainty silver urn which hissed upon her mother's breakfast-table.

"I must set about getting something to do," said Joyce, with eager interest.

Mrs. Hemming nodded.

"Yes, quite so. And have you any idea of what sort of work you want?"

"What do you think I ought to try?" asked Joyce anxiously.

"It isn't what you would like, or what you could try, but what you will be able to get, my dear," said the elder woman frankly. "Teaching, I suppose, is about the only thing you are fit for. Of course, you have been well educated?"

"Yes, very well, and I think I should like teaching very much, especially poor children. I would not wish to be a governess, of course, or anything of that sort."

"Well, I must say I don't think there is much chance of your getting a situation such as Hannah has got, for instance, because, of course, you have had absolutely no training for the work. I will give you one or two addresses, however, to which you may go when you leave the house. I cannot myself accompany you, because I have two meetings to attend to-day; besides, I do not know whether I should go even if I could. It is well that you should stand on your own feet. It is what you would wish, is it not?"

"Oh, yes," cried Joyce, with great enthusiasm. "And I don't even know whether I ought to stay here. I have no claim upon you, and I think it was extremely kind of you to keep me here last night."

"I could not do otherwise when you came to my door so late," said Mrs. Hemming gravely; "and I think, if you feel that you can be comfortable, you had better remain here in the meantime; it will be better for you for many reasons."

"I will stay gladly, of course, if you will allow me to pay," said Joyce, but with some confusion, fearing almost lest her suggestion should be resented.

"Why, certainly, if you stay you must pay, because I am very poor, and have the greatest possible difficulty in getting ends to meet. I have all the heart to be hospitable, but not the means. You don't feel inclined to go back to Denmark Hill, then, this morning, and ask to be forgiven for the step you took last night?"

Joyce coloured, and her eyes dropped down.

"No, I can't go back now," she said, in a low, difficult voice. "Do you think I ought?"

"I gave you my opinion last night, my dear girl. I am of the same mind still."

"And if my father and mother should seek me here," cried Joyce, "promise me you will not join them in seeking to drive me back to the old life."

"Oh, no, I will keep on entirely neutral ground," said Mrs. Hemming, with the same still inscrutable smile. "But I am not at all afraid of your father and mother seeking you."

"Why?" asked Joyce, moved by curiosity.

"Because I think you have offended them too deeply, and that the first advance will have to come from your side."

Joyce said nothing, but was not at all convinced that Mrs. Hemming was right. She lived in momentary expectation, indeed, of hearing a knock at the door, and her father's voice inquiring for her. There would not be much difficulty, she knew, in their finding out her present whereabouts, because they would turn naturally to Hannah first, and she would at once guess to whom she had gone.

"You know, I suppose, that Philip Dane and his brother live in the flat above us?" said Mrs. Hemming presently, changing the subject.

"I knew they lived near here," Joyce answered. "I should like to see the little boy; he is a sad invalid, is he not?"

"He is an invalid, but not at all sad. Bobbie is perhaps the brightest soul in all this great dreary building. It always does me good to see him. I think after we have breakfasted you might run up

and have a little talk with him. He would interest you, I am sure."

"I should like it above all things," said Joyce, "and I suppose his brother will have gone out to his work?"

"Oh, yes, Philip goes out at six, I believe. I sometimes hear him going downstairs if I am lying awake; he is seldom late."

When they rose from breakfast, Joyce went off upstairs, and Mrs. Hemming smiled as the door closed upon her, thinking how natural it was for her to step out and leave everything behind. It was the force of home habit, where everything was done for her and no service required at her hands.

Joyce found the door of the upper flat wide open, and the woman whose duty it was to make the place comfortable for the two brothers sweeping out the little hall. She was an unlovely specimen of her kind, but an honest, faithful soul who could be trusted with the house and all its small contents.

"Yes, you can go in," she said, giving her head a jerk towards the inner portion of the little hall. Joyce stepped in somewhat timidly, but before she reached the kitchen door a shrill voice called out, "Who wants me? Whoever it is can come in."

Thus guided, she entered the bright, homely little place where the morning sun lay in a golden flood.

Bobbie had got up for the day, and was reclining in his invalid chair, which had been one of his brother's many gifts to him. He looked much surprised at the sight of his friend's face and figure in the doorway, but something in the girl's eyes, which grew moist with sweet compassion as they rested on his pale worn face, which looked so child-like and yet so old, attracted him in that first look, and he beckoned her to enter with his grave, old-fashioned smile.

"I don't know you, but I think you are nice," he said. "Come in and sit down. Where have you come from?"

"I came from downstairs," she answered. "I am staying with Mrs. Hemming."

"Oh, are you? I thought it was Mrs. Hemming coming up to see me; I didn't know she had anyone staying with her."

"My name is Joyce—Joyce Wyndham," she answered. "I have heard of you from Hannah Thrale. You know Hannah, don't you?"

"Rather," said Bobbie, with an appreciative glance from his large dark eyes. "So you are Joyce Wyndham; I have heard her speak of you, and Philly has told me about you, too. I think you look rather nice."

Joyce smiled at this candid expression of opinion, and sat down in front of him, feeling quite at home

with the boy who was like, and yet so unlike his brother.

"What are you stopping at Mrs. Hemming's for?" he asked wonderingly. "I thought you were a swell; I am sure Philip said so."

"No, I am not; at least, if I ever was I am not now," answered Joyce, with a smile which made her face look very sweet indeed to the lad who saw very few kind faces, and whose eyes were so quick to read them. "I have come to live just a little while with Mrs. Hemming, and I am going to earn my own living."

"Oh, are you?" inquired the boy, with great interest. "What are you going to do?"

"Teach, I suppose," said Joyce; "but perhaps I will be able to tell you more about it when I come back at night. I am going out to look for work to-day."

"It seems queer, it does," said the lad, fixing her with his large, penetrating eyes. "You don't look like one to look for work. Phil has had to look for work in his time, but not for ever so long. He has been on a good job for nigh a year now. Say, I don't think you will like it."

"But we have got to do a lot of things we don't like in this world, haven't we?" said Joyce, forgetful how remiss she had been in the performance of this

"My name is Joyce—Joyce Wyndham." [*Page* 207.

very duty, praise of which now fell so glibly from her lips.

"Do you know any stories?" asked the boy suddenly; "any good new stories? I know all Philip's from beginning to end, and Hannah's too; but perhaps you know some new ones?"

"I know a lot of stories," Joyce answered readily. "If you tell me what kind you like, I will come and tell you stories until you are tired; there is nothing I like better. I can make them up, too," she said brightly; "at least, I can improve on the ones I have read."

"All right; when will you come and tell me some of them?" he asked, bluntly.

"Perhaps this evening, after I come in from my search for work. Don't you get very tired lying here day after day?"

CHAPTER XX.

THE PLAIN SPEECH OF HANNAH.

"OH, yes," said the boy, with a grave, rather sad look flitting across his face. "I do get tired, awfully, especially when Philly has to go out all the evening after he comes in from work. Don't you think my brother a great splendid fellow? I think he ought to have been a king."

Joyce never forgot the glory on the hunchback's face as he spoke of his brother in a voice tremulous with adoring love. It was a revelation to her, and it gave her an insight into Philip Dane's nature which nothing else could have done.

"He is so grand and clever, there is nothing he could not do if he liked," said the boy quickly, "only he prefers being a common working man, so that he can always be among working men. He says they are his brothers, and that Jesus of Nazareth Himself was not ashamed because He was a carpenter. Do you know the story of Jesus of Nazareth?"

Joyce felt, she could not tell why, a sense of shame stealing over her. Had she not been taught to lisp His name from her very childhood? and yet how far off she was from understanding the spirit of His teaching and life which seemed to be understood and applied by these simple people, who had so little of what the world regards as its precious things!

"Oh, yes, I know His story, of course; I have always known it, I think, since I was a child," she answered, but with a slight hesitation which, however, the boy did not understand.

"Of course, that is the story of stories; all the rest are well enough, but none of them are like that. I never tire of it. Shall I tell you what I think sometimes? That Philly is like Jesus of Nazareth. He goes about all the time trying to do good among people. He spends nearly all his money, except what we need here, and we try to do with as little as we can so that he will have more to spend on the poor who have no money and who can't get work."

"But I should have thought," said Joyce, keeping her voice steady with an effort, "I should have thought that you were not very rich here?"

"Oh, we are not rich," said the boy cheerfully "but of course when Philly has settled work he has

a big wage—far more than we could spend—and so he gives it all away. Sometimes people ask him why he does not save any money. Have you ever asked him that?"

"No, indeed," answered Joyce, "I should not dream of asking him any such question."

"Well, if you did ask him he would tell you that the Master never saved anything, that He never had any money. Phil copies Him in everything, or tries to do it. He would not like me to say any more than that."

"I suppose he goes to church always regularly?" said Joyce, more for the sake of something to say, and anxious to continue the theme which was of such absorbing interest to her.

"No, he never goes to church, at least not often. I can't tell you why; but perhaps if you ask him he will explain it to you. You see, he knows everything, and can always tell you exactly what he means."

Before Joyce could make any answer to this expression of absolute belief, a quick foot came along the little passage, and Hannah Thrale walked in upon them. At sight of her Bobbie displayed the liveliest delight.

"Two visitors all in one morning!" he cried joyfully. "What news for Philly when he comes home!"

"I am afraid I did not come to see you this morning, Bobbie," said Hannah, as she came swiftly to his side, and, stooping down, kissed him as affectionately as was her wont. "Of course, I am very glad to see you, all the same; but it is this young lady I have come to talk to."

Joyce noticed that she did not offer to kiss her, nor did she give her any greeting, except a somewhat mournful and reproachful glance.

"I have come to take your new visitor away, Bobbie, just for a minute. I have something very particular to say to her; I daresay she will come back directly. You don't mind, do you?"

"Oh no," said Bobbie brightly, but at the same time his face wore a slightly disappointed look.

"She shall be back in a few minutes, I promise you. I can't stay, you see, because it is quite early in the day, and I have such a lot to do at home. Just come downstairs a minute, Joyce, will you? Of course, you have a pretty good guess what I have come to say."

She turned away as she spoke, and Joyce felt compelled to follow her, although she knew very well she was about to hear some more unpalatable truths. But there was something quite imperative in Hannah's manner that morning, and Joyce did not dream of disobeying her.

"Oh, Joyce—Joyce Wyndham, what have you done?" Hannah said, the moment they were without the door. "We need not go any further than this. I can say here what I want. Mr. Dane won't mind my going into his sitting-room without a special invitation."

She pushed open the door on the other side of the passage, and Joyce followed her in, too much agitated by Hannah's very grave and disturbed manner to take much notice of the room, which at another time would have been most interesting to her. It was a very plain, bare little place, singularly devoid of all those little dainty charms which a woman adds to the poorest place, making it into a home. It was used by Philip Dane chiefly as a study, and his books and papers lay about in confusion on the common deal table which stood in the middle of the floor not even adorned by the cheapest of table-covers.

"I have seen your brother this morning, Joyce," Hannah began at once. "He came in on his way to business. What can you mean by this extraordinary step?"

"I don't think you need ask that in such a surprised tone of voice," said Joyce, a little petulantly. "You have known all along that I have been contemplating some such step. I am only showing

those who would not believe in me that I am in earnest."

"But it is so senseless and so silly," cried Hannah, with a groan. "What have you run away from, and why? If you had been persecuted, or ill-used, or anything at home, I could have understood it; but such a home! Joyce, you don't know what you are doing; but you will know very soon, unless you go straight back to your mother and ask her on your penitent knees to forgive you."

"I won't do that, you may be very sure," said Joyce, with the first touch of sulkiness Hannah had ever seen in her. "I am not aware that I have done anything to require forgiveness."

"You will know some day," said Hannah, with a great sigh. "You don't even ask how they are this morning, or how they are bearing the blow you have inflicted on them."

"I told my mother I should be quite safe in the letter I left, and that she need not worry about me," said Joyce, in the same low, rather resentful voice.

"That isn't it," cried Hannah quickly, in a great burst of indignation. "It is the frightful ingratitude you have shown them. The very idea that their own child, on whom they have lavished everything, should have treated them so will break their hearts. Oh,

Joyce, I have never felt anything so much in all my life. But you will go back, this very day, too, won't you?"

"No, I won't," answered Joyce; "and if you hadn't anything better to say to me than that, you need not have come," she said quickly. "I have taken the decisive step, and I am going to prove that I have something in me. I only claim the right to live my own life."

"And nothing your best friends can say or do will change your mind, then?" said Hannah sadly. "Mrs. Hemming thinks as I do; she has just been telling me of all she has said to you."

"I am frightfully disappointed in you all, I can tell you," said Joyce petulantly. "I cannot think why you imagine yourselves to be supporters of a cause, because you are not; you preach freedom, but you won't allow others to practise it."

"Oh, I have no patience with you," said Hannah, "and I am not going to stop here to talk to you. One thing only I must tell you, and that is, that if you think your father and mother are going to run after you now, begging you to go back, you are mistaken. From what your brother said this morning, I rather think they are inclined to let you go your own way, now you have chosen it.'

"I am very glad to hear it," answered Joyce, "and I didn't think they would prove so sensible." But at the same time her heart sank, and somehow the future, which was so rosy an hour ago, began to wear a different look.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE REALITY.

HANNAH did not prolong her visit. She had simply come to satisfy herself that Joyce was under Mrs. Hemming's care, and having delivered herself of her usual frank expression of opinion, she retired home to her household duties, and to confide the history of Joyce's escapade to her father. She was surprised to find him rather interested and inclined to be sympathetic a little towards the girl, who, though mistaken in her ideas, had still the courage to strike out a new path for herself.

"I wonder how you would look if I were to gird up my loins and go off in any such fashion, leaving you in the lurch, daddy?" said Hannah, rather indignantly; whereat the old man laughed softly, and followed her quick, lithe, graceful movements with an affectionate smile.

"Ah, I know you would not do that, my dear," was all he said.

Mrs. Hemming had a busy day, and it was almost

six o'clock before she returned from her long attendance at an afternoon meeting. She had given Joyce a latch-key, so that each was independent of the other's home-coming. As she came off the car in the Clerkenwell Road, and glanced up at her own window, she caught a glimpse of Joyce sitting disconsolately there, looking listlessly out into the street. Her face did not wear a bright, hopeful look, and Mrs. Hemming was therefore not at all unprepared for the tale of disappointment and discouragement to which she listened. Both were tired and hungry, but, accustomed to being waited on and having everything prepared for her, it had not occurred to Joyce that she might improve her leisure by getting tea ready for her kind hostess, thus showing herself too careless of practical details. Already things were wearing a different aspect to the headstrong and mistaken girl, and during the long hours of that stifling day, when she had trod the burning streets on her strange and self-appointed quest, her thoughts had often turned longingly towards the cool greenness of her father's garden, and the fragrant shade of the comfortable family house, where four-and-twenty hours ago she had been a cherished inmate.

"Well, my dear, what luck?" said Mrs. Hemming cheerfully, as she came bustling in, her large presence

seeming to fill all the little room, dwarfing it in comparison.

Joyce turned to her with a quick sigh of relief.

"Oh, I am so glad to see you," she cried; "it has been such a long, disappointing day."

"You didn't find, I suppose, that easy and congenial situations come to us for the mere asking?" said Mrs. Hemming good-humouredly. "Well, I hardly expected you would. Where did you go first?"

"I went to the agency in Oxford Street to which you recommended me, and when I said that I had no experience, the manageress simply shook her head and said she could not suit me. Then I went to Mr. Baynes in Southampton Row, and he said there was no vacancy in any of the schools in which he is interested, but promised to inquire whether any supernumeraries could be taken on."

"And what about the orphanage at Hammersmith?" asked Mrs. Hemming.

"I went there also, but I don't think I should like that sort of work," said Joyce, with a little dreary smile. "It distressed me dreadfully to see all those poor little things dressed exactly alike, like so many wooden dolls. I think to teach in such a place would crush the life out of me."

"Why not give up the idea of teaching al-

together," suggested Mrs. Hemming, "and try something else? How would you like a business life?"

"Do you mean a shop?" asked Joyce, with a very expressive shrug.

Mrs. Hemming laughed silently.

"And supposing I did mean a shop? I thought you were bent upon earning your own living. It doesn't matter where or how, so long as it is done honestly."

"But it is not only a living I want to get," cried Joyce desperately, feeling that she was being misunderstood all round. "I want a sphere where I can be useful, and do good to people, and be kind to them."

"Well, you would have plenty of companions in a shop, and lots of opportunities for fulfilling that very desire," said Mrs. Hemming; "or would you not like to go and learn typewriting? So many young ladies go in for that now, and you have plenty of money to pay the necessary fees."

"No, I shouldn't like that," said Joyce, rather discontentedly. "I should feel like a machine myself. I want contact with people—little children, if possible. It seems to me that there ought to be a corner for me in this great world. It isn't very much I ask."

"Not very much, perhaps," observed Mrs. Hemming a little sadly, "but there are thousands and tens of thousands asking the same question in this city, and people to whom it is a question of more desperate moment than it is to you. It is one of the truths that will come home to you, my dear, if you persist in your search for a career."

"It all seems so sad and unequal," said Joyce. "I can't think how the Creator can bear to have it so; it seems to me that the world is all a chaos, and that there is very little justice or real order anywhere."

"You are tired, my dear, and if you had bustled about and got some tea ready for us, instead of sitting moping at the window when you came in, you would feel better than you do now. Get up now, and put the kettle on the gas stove, and let me show you how to be useful in the most elementary fashion. You need not be at all cast down, although it is days and weeks before you get anything to do."

This was rather cold comfort; but, as the days went by, Joyce proved that Mrs. Hemming knew very well what she was talking about. The enforced idleness, which gave her so much time to brood, became almost intolerable; although she had never admitted it, even to herself, she felt keenly that her parents had not made the slightest effort to discover her whereabouts. She was, of course, quite unaware

that Mrs. Hemming had communicated with them. That good lady, for reasons of her own, had thought it wiser not to enlighten her, and believed that it would do her good to be taught that she was not of such immense importance after all.

One afternoon, after she had been sitting for an hour with Bobbie Dane, she put on her hat and walked out into the pleasant sunshine. Pursued by an impulse which she could not control, she turned in the direction of her old home, to which she had been so often drawn in thought, although until now she had resisted the desire to revisit that neighbourhood. As she walked up the wide, pleasant road, under the delicious shade of the spreading trees, she felt sick at heart, and almost longed to return, like the prodigal of old, praying to be forgiven; but something kept her back, and when she reached the familiar gate she only took one hurried glance at the smooth, green lawns, her eyes so blurred with the mist of tears that they scarcely took in the blaze of the geranium beds, which showed up so exquisitely against the soft turf. Before she had passed the little wicket, she saw in the distance a dainty figure in white muslin carrying a white lace parasol which shaded her face so that she was close upon her before she recognised Ursula Meynell.

"Why, Joyce, is that you? Have you come

home?" cried the girl, with a pleased note in her voice; but at the same time her eyes took in, almost painfully, the change in Joyce's appearance. She had taken a very scanty wardrobe with her to Clerkenwell, and the blue serge coat and skirt being exposed day by day to the dust and the glare of the sun, had lost its freshness. So had Joyce's face. She looked worn and sad, Ursula thought, with a little rush of pity for her.

"No, I haven't come home," said Joyce awkwardly; "I was only taking a walk up this way. I hope you are quite well, Ursula; you look it."

"Yes, I am quite well, thank you. Guess where I am going—to a garden party at Dr. Ferrars'."

"That is why you are so smart," said Joyce, feeling the contrast keenly between her own appearance and Ursula's. "I did not know that they went in for garden parties."

"Oh, they don't as a rule, as you know; but they have a cousin of Jack's staying there just now—a Scotch girl—and they are making an awful fuss of her. The old doctor wants Jack and her to make a match of it."

This was purely an experimental speech on Ursula's part, but it did not have much effect upon Joyce.

"I suppose my father and mother will be there,"

she said, trying to speak naturally, but failing miserably.

"Oh, no, they won't. Didn't you know they are out of town?" cried Ursula, in surprise.

"No; where have they gone?"

"Well, of course your mother was naturally a bit upset," said Ursula, looking straight before her, as if not at all interested in what she was saying, "and your father has taken her away for a voyage. They have gone to America."

"America!" cried Joyce, and her face paled. "Oh, impossible, Ursula; it cannot be. Mamma has always said she would never cross the Atlantic, although papa so often wished her to go and visit her brother there."

"Well, they have gone now," said Ursula, with a nod. "They sailed last Saturday."

"And how long are they to be gone?" asked Joyce.

"Three months, Tom said."

"And where is To ?"

"Tom is living at the Ferrars', and the servants have all gone on holiday."

"Oh," said Joyce. "Well, I must go. Good-bye, Ursula."

"But you are not going like this, Joyce, without

telling me anything about yourself. What are you doing?"

"Nothing," answered Joyce. "I have nothing to tell you."

"Are you doing work of any kind? Have you got a situation? I understood your mother to say before she went away that you were going to become a schoolmistress, or something of that kind."

"I want to; but I haven't found a situation. But it cannot interest you very much, Ursula. You and I walk different ways now," she said. "Excuse me—good-bye." And before Ursula could detain her she had walked on quickly, and so evidently wished to be left alone that Ursula could do nothing but proceed on her own way.

"Three months—gone to America for three months!" repeated Joyce to herself; "and without even making one effort, or asking a single question about me. How dared they!"

CHAPTER XXII.

UNDERCURRENTS.

URSULA thought about Joyce all the way to the doctor's house. Intimate as she was with the Wyndhams, she had never heard the complete story of Joyce's escapade, and when confidence was not offered did not like to ask questions. When she arrived at the large, shady garden surrounding the doctor's house, her attention was arrested for several minutes by the brilliant gathering assembled there. The Ferrars were immensely popular in the neighbourhood, and as this was the first entertainment they had given since Mrs. Ferrars' death, every invitation had been eagerly accepted. Ursula, of course, knew most of those present. Her father had arrived before her, and was sitting under a friendly awning enjoying a cigarette and some iced lemonade. The cousin in whose honour the party was given was receiving the guests beside her uncle on the lawn. She was a bright, fresh-coloured, happy-looking girl, who won affection by her simple, unaffected manner

and bright, cheerful disposition. She was enjoying herself immensely, and showed it without restraint.

"How do you do, Miss Macdougall?" said Ursula frankly. "What a crowd you have gathered, Dr. Ferrars," she added to the old man. "Why, everybody is here. See what it is to be adored by one's patients."

"It is very kind of everybody to come, and we are pleased to see them," said the old doctor, with his fine courtesy. "One or two of our oldest friends are absent, however."

"Yes," said Ursula, with a nod. "Is Tom Wyndham here? Oh, yes; there he is, making himself agreeable as usual to old Miss Maddison. Now, I call that sweet of him."

"So do I," answered Elsie Macdougall with a smile. "Isn't she a cross-grained old thing? she is always finding fault with somebody."

"Oh, we're used to her, and we don't mind her," said Ursula. "Well, I shall go and relieve him, I think."

On the way, however, she was met by Jack Ferrars, who carried her off, nothing loth, to have an ice.

"Just guess who I met outside the gate just now, Jack?" she asked.

"Never guessed anything in my life, Ursula, and you know it," he answered lazily.

"You never tried, you mean. Well, I met Joyce."

He gave a quick start, and looked at her keenly.

"Really?"

"Really, and she didn't look as if she were conspicuously enjoying her new career."

"And didn't you speak to her?"

"Why, of course, and told her where I was going. Just imagine, she hadn't the slightest idea that her father and mother had gone to America. I caught her loitering about the gate of Overton—looked rather suspicious, didn't it?"

"How did she look?" asked Ferrars, in a low, eager voice, and making no attempt to disguise his lively concern.

"She looked—well, what you would call 'down on her luck,' Jack," answered Ursula, with a little sympathetic note in her voice. "She was very shabbily dressed, and looked a bit pale and tired. I felt very sorry for her."

"Which way did she go?" inquired Jack, tugging at his moustache.

"Up towards the station; probably to go back to the city."

"I might catch her. Excuse me, won't you, Ursula? and don't say where I've gone unless Tom happens to ask."

Ursula nodded, and sighed a little as she watched the handsome, manly figure striding across the lawns like a man who has some set purpose in view. How lovable and true he was, how honest and noble in every relation and action of his life. How misguided and foolish was Joyce Wyndham to set so little store by the gifts which might have been hers—a happy and luxurious home, an assured position among people who had known and loved her all her life, and, above all, the love of a good and honourable man. Ursula was weary thinking of the mystery of life, and the irony of its conflict. Presently Tom caught sight of her sitting alone under a tree, and made straight for her side.

"I thought I saw Jack in your train a minute ago," he said, as he took off his straw hat and waved it about in a vain endeavour to raise a little air.

"So he was, but he has gone out. I told him I met Joyce outside, on Denmark Hill, and I rather think he has gone to see whether he can see her too."

"You saw Joyce," said Tom incredulously. "What was she doing?"

"Looking in at the gate of Overton when I caught sight of her first. I thought it a good sign, Mr. Tom."

"A sign of what?" asked Tom rather absently, and on his honest face there dwelt a great shadow.

"A sign that her heart is turning home, I thought," said Ursula gently.

"Perhaps. Do you think Ferrars would see her? I'd like to go out after him, but it might be noticed."

"He'll see her if she had to wait for the train at Denmark Hill Station. She was going there."

"Perhaps I'd better leave it, then," said Tom. "What did she say to you, Ursula?"

"Not very much; she seemed dull and out of sorts, I thought. She has not got anything to do."

"I'll see what Ferrars says when he comes back. Father said I wasn't to send her any money, and that she must be made to feel the brunt of what she has done; but, hang it all, a fellow can't bear the idea of his sister being in a tight place, especially when he has plenty himself."

"I understand just how you feel. I do feel so sorry for you all," said Ursula, in her gentle, sympathetic voice.

"I say, wouldn't it be jolly if I could get her to come back before father and mother come home?"

"It would indeed. Why, Tom, there's Hannah Thrale and her father coming in at the gate. Do you think they could be invited?"

"Oh, I think so; in fact, I know they were," said Tom, a bit confusedly. "The doctor thinks no end of the old man. Fine-looking, isn't he?"

"Very, and Hannah looks lovely. There is something about her which distinguishes her from every other girl here, and yet I don't suppose her frock cost as much as my parasol, which I paid three guineas for in Bond Street," said Ursula, with a curious, rather bitter glance at the dainty arrangement of white lace and pink chiffon, called by courtesy a parasol. She was not given to bitterness of speech or look, but she had seen the light leap in Tom Wyndham's eyes as they fell on the tall, graceful figure, which was robed in a dove-coloured merino frock and a white muslin fichu with exquisite becomingness, and presently she got up and went over to a bevy of girls she knew, and joined in their gay chatter with all her might. She surprised some of them, who regarded her as rather a sedate person. But nobody read between the lines.

When she next saw Tom, he was at Hannah's side. About half-an-hour later Jack Ferrars sauntered into the grounds again, and Ursula and Tom, who both scanned his face eagerly, were not encouraged by it. He walked directly over to the seat where Tom sat beside Hannah Thrale.

"How do you do, Miss Thrale?" he said, shaking hands with her with less cordiality than usual. "Tom, I have just parted from your sister."

"From Joyce?" exclaimed Hannah, and her lips

parted in eager interest. "She has not been here, has she?"

"No," answered Ferrars rather curtly, for the contrast between this girl, looking so dainty and sweet in her simple, cool gown, and poor Joyce, shabby, hot, and tired, in her dusty blue serge, was painful to him, and he could not forget that it was due, indirectly at least, to Hannah Thrale that she was an exile from her home. Hannah read his face as if it had been an open book.

"I know what you are thinking, Dr. Ferrars," she said quickly. "Mr. Wyndham will tell you that I did everything in my power to dissuade her from the step she took. I have not known a happy hour since."

"The fact remains that out of her acquaintance with you arose the restlessness and discontent which has ended so disastrously," he replied calmly; and Hannah's face flushed hotly. She was sensitive to a degree, but she knew that he spoke the truth, and moreover, sympathised with his bitterness to the full.

"You speak rather strongly. It has not ended disastrously yet. I feel sure that she will yet see the folly of what she is doing."

"Meanwhile those who love her are tortured by dwelling on the anxieties and privations she may be

suffering," he replied, too much hurt and disappointed by the result of his interview with Joyce to weigh his words.

Hannah's grave, beautiful mouth trembled, and when he saw it his conscience smote him a little. For did it mend matters to speak bitterly to Hannah Thrale? nay, it would only make another unhappy.

"I beg you to forgive me," he said, with a return to his usual grave gentleness of manner. "I have no right to speak so to you; it is the more unpardonable that you are my father's guest. But I feel it all so keenly. I don't care who knows that her absence from home and present attitude towards us all is my chief concern in life."

Hannah's eyes were full of tears, and she was unable to speak. Poor Tom, torn by conflicting feelings, tugged mercilessly at his moustache.

"What did she say to you, old chap?" he asked Ferrars.

"She would say nothing, except that she was quite happy, and did not regret anything. But her face belied her words," replied Ferrars gloomily. "And when I implored her to come back, and tried to tell her how she was missed, she only shook her head. She did tell me, as the train came in, that she had the promise of a situation next week."

"Mrs. Hemming told me of it. I fear it will not suit her," said Hannah slowly.

"What kind of a person is this Mrs. Hemming, and why should she heap so much disinterested kindness on a girl who has no claim on her?" asked Ferrars, looking keenly at Hannah.

Her calm eyes met his fearlessly.

"She is one of the kindest and best of women," she said quickly. "Whoever says otherwise of Olivia Hemming speaks falsely. She will take care of Joyce."

At that moment Dr. Ferrars and Elsie Macdougall came over, and their serious talk was disturbed.

"We'd better go and talk to the ladies, Tom," suggested Ferrars, and they crossed the lawn together.

"I say, old chap, what will the old folks say to Hannah Thrale as a daughter-in-law?" he asked, not banteringly, but with all the simple, earnest concern he felt.

"I don't know. It'll be a bit rough on them, Jack; but they'll maybe come round better than we think."

"Then it is serious?" said Ferrars, with a low whistle.

"Yes; I'm only keeping dark till this worry about

Joyce has blown over. You'll stand by me, won't you, old chap?"

"Oh, yes; she's a fine girl. But do you think she's favourably inclined to you, Tom?"

"I—I think so," said Tom, reddening furiously, and speaking with that modest hesitation born of a true and honest love.

"I'm a bit surprised, I confess," said Ferrars. "I shouldn't have thought you a likely couple. But there, life has nothing but surprises for us. I wish this function were over. Isn't Ursula Meynell looking well this afternoon? Why can't you marry her, Tom, and I Elsie Macdougall, and so make everybody pleased and happy all round?"

"Don't know; pure cussedness, I expect," said Tom, with a grin which had very little joy in it. But he felt comforted to feel that Ferrars knew, and that he wished him well.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE REALITY OF LIFE.

IN the month of October the much-talked-of settlement became an accomplished fact. It had long been the idea of Osborne Thrale and a few others that they would be more powerful, and be able to do more good to the class whom they specially wished to benefit, if they were more effectively organised, and they believed that the first step towards that union and fuller brotherhood which they all desired was to live as near as might be to the idea of family life. For this purpose a large, old-fashioned house in the neighbourhood of Westminster Bridge Road was taken, and there in the autumn the experiment was made.

Hannah was very sorry to give up the little house in Camberwell Road for more reasons than she would have cared to explain, but she never dreamed of demurring. Her father's wish was law to her, and she even anticipated a good deal of interest and amusement in watching the working of the experi-

ment. Of late she had become very lukewarm indeed towards the cause, although she carefully hid her change of views from her father, whom it would have seriously grieved. In her younger days she had entered enthusiastically into all his ideals and and hopes, however wild; but of late individual rights and individual happiness had become more important to Hannah than the welfare of humanity at large. Another person who joined the settlement from motives of duty, but who regretted very much leaving the little home he had built up for himself, was Philip Dane. It would be a happy change for Bobbie, for, of course, if the family idea was carried out with any measure of success, he would have fewer lonely hours. The house was divided into suites of rooms, varying in size according to the means of those who were to occupy them.

Among the first to remove to the new settlement were Mrs. Hemming and Joyce Wyndham. October found her still in Mrs. Hemming's care, although she was no longer dependent in any way, having obtained a situation, which, however, was very different from the career of which she had so passionately and vaguely dreamed. Mrs. Hemming had introduced her to a busy man who required some assistance with his letters in the morning, and he afterwards gave her occupation as a copyist at

home. For this she received a small salary; but her needs were few and simple, and the cost of living at the settlement was very low. Since that July day when she had met Ursula Meynell on Denmark Hill, she had avoided the neighbourhood, and had neither seen nor heard anything of her own people. Mrs. Hemming and she shared two rooms together, and Joyce clung to her with a close dependence which had something pathetic in it. Although she had never admitted it even to herself, there was, deep down in her heart, a feeling of bitterness and disappointment because her own kith and kin had allowed her to drop out of their lives, apparently without an effort or pang. She did not know, of course, that this complete ignoring of her existence was part of the wholesome cure which her father and mother had decided was necessary, nor that they were kept constantly acquainted with all her movements, and knew exactly how she was situated in every relation of her life. Of this Hannah Thrale was also ignorant, and she often wondered, not without some feeling of indignation in her heart, that they should have let her go so easily. Mrs. Hemming had indeed kept her secret well.

Joyce was not particularly happy in her daily work; it was not congenial, and the gentleman for whom she worked was irascible, and not easily

pleased ; but so fearful was she of losing her occupation, having proved how difficult it is for the untrained and unskilful to procure work of any kind, that she bore patiently what in the old days would have almost driven her mad. And this also had not been without its wholesome discipline upon the character of Joyce.

October was a very wet month in London that year, and before it closed there was not a leaf upon the trees, and the whole city wore a wintry and desolate look. Joyce had two miles to walk to and from her daily occupation, but she seldom rode, even on a homely omnibus. The few pence required for the luxury which she once despised was now a serious consideration to her slender purse. She was coming somewhat wearily across the busy thoroughfare from Victoria Street to Westminster Bridge Road when she suddenly met Philip Dane face to face. They had seen a good deal of each other of late, and all her spare time was spent with Bobbie, who had swerved from his allegiance to Hannah Thrale and bestowed it all on Joyce. It is not too much to say that but for Bobbie Dane's sympathy and never-failing readiness to hear all she had to say, Joyce could not have endured her life ; it was all so different from what she had hoped and dreamed. Philip Dane had watched her for several

minutes before they met, and had noticed a somewhat sad and weary look on her face, which made her appear years older than she was. It gave his honest heart a keen pang to see her look thus, and he felt a passionate desire to help her in some substantial way, to free her from all the care and burden of the existence that she had deliberately chosen and was now finding so unsatisfying. She smiled faintly when she saw him, and, raising his cap, he took her bag from her, and asked her whether she was very tired.

"Not so very tired," she answered, in a low, quiet voice. "But I have just been told that my services are no longer required, so I am once more among the unemployed."

"Oh, but something else will turn up," he answered bravely. "Everything comes, you know, to those who wait."

"Yes, so they say; but while I wait what is to become of me?" she said, and he saw that she was struggling with her tears. The sight was more than he could bear.

"Don't give way," he said, his voice thrilling with a dangerous earnestness. "Let us go back and sit for a little in the Abbey; you can spare the time, and so can I."

He turned without a moment's hesitation, and,

taking her by the arm, he guided her through the throng of the streets.

"What is the reason for your dismissal?" he asked, as they walked up the grass-edged pavement to the door.

"Mr. Pember is going abroad for the winter on account of his wife's health. She has been ordered away quite suddenly, and they leave on Monday. He paid me a month's salary in lieu of notice."

"You feel it, of course," he said quickly, "because it is your first experience of the kind; but there will be something else found for you to do, and that speedily."

"I didn't find this very speedily," she answered, in the same dull, hopeless voice. "Oh, how beautiful it is in here! How quiet and still always. It makes one forget all the worry of life."

The afternoon service was over, and most of the stragglers had left the Abbey, so that they were almost alone in the great building. They sat down in a quiet seat not far from the door, and were silent for a moment, each feeling the soothing influence of the place.

"I really don't know what I am going to do," said Joyce, in a low, perplexed voice. "I feel almost afraid to go home and tell Mrs. Hemming; she took so much trouble to get me this place before,

and of course it was entirely through her influence I got it. How can I remain dependent upon her? It is impossible."

"You haven't seen or heard anything of your own people, I suppose, since you left?"

"No," answered Joyce. A look of exceeding bitterness crossed her face. "It is almost four months since I left, and they have never made the slightest effort to see me or to persuade me to come back. That shows, does it not, that they can't have been so much attached to me as I once thought."

Philip Dane was silent a moment. He had never approved much of the step Joyce had taken, and he thought her father and mother had good reason to cherish some slight resentment against her; but it must be confessed that he also was extremely puzzled over their absolute ignoring of her very existence. He could not reconcile their lack of interest with what he had heard of their former fondness for her.

"I am afraid," he said gently, "that you have long regretted the step you took."

"I don't know that I have," answered Joyce. "I am very happy in the settlement, and I have found many kind friends there; but I think perhaps we do idealise things, and the reality often falls short."

"There is one to whom your presence in the settlement is a source of perpetual joy and gratitude," said Dane warmly, "and that is my poor brother. You have given him more brightness in his life during the last month than he has ever before known. He is always speaking of you; I wish you could only hear him. It would be some little recompense to you for all your unselfish kindness to him."

"Oh, hush!" cried Joyce, and her voice had a ring of pain in it. "No one could be unkind to the poor boy, and he has more than repaid me; he is so sympathetic, and he understands everything so quickly. I suppose it is the life of isolation that he has led that has made him so keenly observant and so quick to understand, especially when people are sorrowful and sad."

She leaned back in her seat as she spoke, fixed her eyes on the great window before her, and was silent. Philip Dane was silent, too, but did not take his eyes from her face, and he was struck by the sharpness of its outline. The last three months had robbed Joyce Wyndham's face of its girlish roundness, and had left some lines there of pain and care. A vast pity for her helplessness and loneliness took possession of him, and his face became suffused with the intensity of his feeling, of

Philip Dane was silent, too, but did not take his eyes from her face.
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which, however, Joyce remained for the moment utterly unconscious. She felt quite at home with Philip Dane, and had altogether lost that conscious feeling which had sometimes troubled her in the early part of their acquaintance. The little halo of romance with which she had invested him in the old days, when she had looked at him from afar, as it were, had disappeared, and in its place there was a sense of comradeship which one might feel towards a brother who is fighting the battle of life daily by one's side.

"And should you have difficulty in getting another situation," he said presently, "what will you do? Do you not think it would be a wise step to go back to your people?"

"No," said Joyce quickly; then she brought her eyes from the window and flashed them somewhat indignantly on his face. "That I shall never do. I can't tell you how fearfully bitter I feel against them for never having taken the slightest trouble to find me. I might be dead for all they care."

CHAPTER XXIV.

PAST THE RUBICON.

TRULY as he loved Joyce Wyndham, and much as he sympathised with her, the manifest unjustness of her attitude towards her parents struck Dane somewhat painfully.

"No doubt they still wait to hear from you," he suggested. "You forget that you left them no clue; they may have been searching—they may be searching for you even now."

Joyce curled her lip.

"I don't think it at all likely. They could find me very easily if they wished; but I believe they are glad to get rid of me. I was always rather a trouble to them, especially lately."

The tone of her words, as well as their substance, jarred upon Dane, and Joyce felt intuitively that he did not approve of her attitude.

"I cannot understand it," she said petulantly. "Everyone seems against me. Hannah and Mrs. Hemming, and now you seem to think that I ought

to go back humbly to my father and mother, and beg to be taken back. How could I do it and keep my own self-respect?"

"I don't see that it would involve any loss of it," said Dane quietly. "You have simply tried an experiment which has failed. Surely everyone is entitled to change their opinion if circumstances and experience justify it."

"Why do you say that I have tried an experiment which has failed?" asked Joyce quickly. "Am I a failure because I have been dismissed from my situation through no fault of my own?"

"I was not thinking particularly of your situation," he answered, "but of life generally. Tell me frankly, Miss Wyndham, what have you gained by quitting your father's house and casting in your lot with us?"

"Nothing, from a worldly point of view," answered Joyce. "Yet I have gained something which I shall never lose again, an insight into the lives of those who earn their bread by the sweat of their brow, and I have learnt a lesson in independence; perhaps, too," and here she looked up at him with a sweet, slightly coquettish smile, "I have learned to be content with small things, and to believe in the sincerity and single-mindedness of those who have befriended me."

"Then you haven't the slightest idea what you will do if you should be unsuccessful in finding something else to do?" repeated Dane, dwelling with a strange persistence on one particular point.

"No, I haven't the slightest idea. No doubt something will turn up. Oh, I am so sick of my life, and why I was born I cannot tell. I am not of the slightest use, and never have been, to anybody. Don't you think it would be the simplest way out of the difficulty, and a substantial relief to my friends, if I were to put an end to it?"

"Hush!" he said sternly; "that is the worst part of you speaking now, and it is only because you are tired and disheartened that you allow yourself to utter such words, even in jest. You say you have never been of the slightest use to anyone in the world. I wonder if you will believe that you have made it a glorified place for one."

She looked up at him suddenly, and before his impassioned eyes her own fell quickly. Having said so much, it was impossible for him not to say more, and Joyce listened with a strangely beating heart, not sure whether she felt pleased or vexed with him. She made no response, but sat with her eyes fixed on the ground, the hot colour flaming in her cheeks.

"I know that I have no right to speak to you so," said Dane, all his hesitation gone, and allowing the

passion of his heart to vibrate through his voice; "but seeing you as you are, and knowing what life must be in this city for a woman who is alone, I cannot any longer be silent."

"Oh, I wish you would," cried Joyce, with a note of distress in her voice. "Our friendship has been so pleasant; why spoil it?"

"It need not be spoilt," said Dane bravely; "but you must have seen and guessed long ago that the feeling I have for you is something more than friendship."

"If I have known it," said Joyce, in a low, sweet voice, "I have tried not to think about it."

"Then it is quite hopeless for me," he said, something of the eager brightness dying out of his face. "I might have known it would be, because, after all, I am only a common workman, and you are a lady."

"It is not that," cried Joyce quickly, looking up as if she had been stung; "it is unkind, unjust of you to speak like that, when you know that I regard nothing nobler in the world than work, and that I honour all who do it."

"But the fact remains," he said, in the same low, quiet voice, "that we are of a different order. Perhaps it is because I have never seen anyone just like you—at least, I have not got to know anyone so

intimately, and so, of course, there could only be one ending for me. I have dreamed my dreams; may I tell you what I have seen in my moments of most exalted folly?"

Joyce did not say aye or nay; she simply sat in silence once more, interested beyond measure in what he was saying, and yet having a strange feeling that she stood upon the outside, and that his words did not affect her personally at all, which showed that they did not find any serious or true response in her heart.

"I have thought lately, when I have seen you so tired and so troubled over petty worries which should not be allowed to come near you, I have thought that it might be possible to build up a little home in the country, far from this horrible, sorrow-laden city, and where, though the things I could give you would necessarily be simple and plain, still they might suffice."

"Oh, how good of you to think of me in that way at all," cried Joyce, and her eyes grew moist and tender; but still there was something in her words which sent a chill to the heart of the man who listened to them, for the woman who has any love to give in return does not thank the man who pours the treasures of his heart at her feet, but simply accepts, giving her own in return.

"I suppose," he said, "it was a mad dream, and I may bury it for ever?"

"Oh, I don't know," cried Joyce wearily; "it is so difficult to know what is right, and even to know what one wants, I think, in this world. Life seems to grow more complicated every day, and I almost feel now that I should be glad to give myself and my future into the hands of one who would decide for me in everything. It would be such a relief."

At another time Philip Dane might have smiled at these words. Four little months, that was all it had taken to convince Joyce that the struggle for existence is hard, and that the problems of life are not so easily solved as she had dreamed. Freedom has its uses and its advantages, no doubt; but it has also its thorns. Although Dane felt somewhat repelled by her words, she had not altogether discouraged him, and keeping his eyes fixed upon the face which had grown dearer to him than any earthly thing, he ventured to speak still further of the hope which he had cherished so long.

"That you should listen to me so gently, and not tell me at once that I presume, gives me some courage to go on. Do you think that I may dare to hope that perhaps in some far-off time you might grow accustomed to the idea? I should devote my life to you in trying to make you happy."

"No, you could not do that," she said quickly; "remember the cause and how you are pledged to it."

The colour mounted high in his cheek, and he made a slight gesture of impatience.

"The cause does not forbid the forging of other ties. The chances are that if I should ever be so incomparably blessed, I might, nay, I should certainly be, a better servant to the cause of humanity, because my own happiness would make me very tender and compassionate to all others less blessed than I."

His eloquence touched her inexpressibly. Her eyes, as they met his, were full of tears.

"Almost you persuade me," she said unsteadily; "but I am not fit to marry anyone. I have always said that I should never marry. You have no idea how selfish I am, and how little I know that would be useful to me in such an estate. I am sure that, were I to take you at your word, you would regret it."

"Never," he said huskily. "I myself thought that I should never marry, and I had never seen a woman who made me think of marriage until I met you. Do you remember the first night we met at the Thrales' in Camberwell Road?"

"Yes, I do," answered Joyce; "and now, when I

come to think of it, I believe that it was what you said in your speech that night which decided me to seek something nobler than living selfishly at ease in my father's house. What I can't understand is why you and Hannah and Mrs. Hemming, and everyone who ought to have rejoiced over my secession to your ranks, should have disapproved so much of the step I took."

"It is consideration for you," he answered readily. "We know what the struggle for existence is, and there seemed no reason why you should enter upon it when there was no need."

"That is not a very high view to take of the case," said Joyce. "You teach in your public utterances that self-sacrifice and self-denial is demanded from all who would fulfil their highest destiny here, and yet when it comes to my individual case you are horrified that I should practise even in such a small degree the very doctrine you preach."

Philip Dane smiled, a little struck by the shrewdness of her argument.

"It is only out of consideration for you," he repeated; "the motive is all right, but there was a question of expediency to be considered. But you have led me clearly away from the point," he said, bringing his earnest eyes to bear fully upon her face. "What is it to be between us? Friendship only,

or something more? I don't care how long I may have to wait if only I may keep before me the vision which I have told you."

"I cannot answer just yet," she said, rising; "it has come rather suddenly upon me, but I will think of it. Now we had better go home."

CHAPTER XXV.

AN UNEXPECTED VISITOR.

THAT night there was a meeting in another part of London to which most of the dwellers in the settlement went. Osborne Thrale, however, suffering from a feverish cold, was obliged to remain at home, and Hannah, for whom the meetings of the brotherhood had less and less charm, remained with him, pleading as an excuse that he was too ill to be left.

About eight o'clock, after she had given him his early supper and left him in the hope that he would fall into a refreshing sleep, there came an unexpected knock at her door. She felt much annoyed and almost inclined to leave it unanswered. She had looked forward to having this quiet evening, although she had no very clear idea what she intended to do with it. What was her astonishment when she opened the door, with no very cordial look on her face, to behold on the threshold the tall figure of Tom Wyndham. She was glad of the dim light

in the little hall, and that the hot flush which sprang unbidden to her face was unobserved.

"Mr. Wyndham!" she exclaimed, in astonishment, "what are you doing here, and how did you find us out?"

"I have had some difficulty, I assure you, but I got the address from my mother, as it happened, by the merest accident."

"Your father and mother have returned, then, from America?" she said, with her usual bright, frank manner. "I suppose now you have come you had better come in. I am sorry to tell you my father is ill in bed, and I have been rather anxious about him all day."

"Oh, I am sorry to hear that," said Tom, walking in without the slightest embarrassment or hesitation; indeed, there was about his whole attitude and bearing that quiet, singular decision which seemed to indicate that he was in no manner of doubt about his own purpose. The little sitting-room in the settlement was neither so large nor so pleasant as the old room in Camberwell Road. Hannah had done her best, however, to make it dainty and pretty, and as the window only looked out upon a little narrow court shut in by tall tenements of brick, she had draped it so artistically that the dreariness of the outlook was forgotten.

"I have no fire," she said apologetically, as she turned up the gas, "because I have been sitting with father a good part of the day, and there is the kitchen, of course. Perhaps you would like to come into the kitchen; it is warmer. We have no servant now; it is one of the rules of the settlement that the work must be done by all the members themselves."

"Isn't it rather hard on you?" asked Tom, but the words fell from his lips carelessly, and without much thought; his whole interest and attention were absorbed by the sight of the sweet face of the woman he loved, which seemed to his eager vision to have grown more sad and careworn than when he saw it last.

"Oh, we help each other," she answered brightly, finding it well to avoid his gaze. "Are you coming into the kitchen, then, or shall we stay here? I don't think it is very cold; do you?"

"It is rather bleak outside; it rains, you see. It is all right here, if you won't feel it. Yes, my father and mother have been home about three weeks. They hear regularly from your friend with the odd name, Mrs. Hemming. How is Joyce getting on?"

"Oh, all right, I think," answered Hannah, who was as yet unaware of what had happened to Joyce that day. "She is still acting as secretary to that

Mr. Pember in Pont Street. I don't think she likes it particularly; still she knows, as a working woman, that she must not quarrel with her bread and butter."

Tom gave a little whistle.

"Fancy Joyce a working woman! I say, Miss Thrale, what do you honestly think of it all? Don't you think it is unutterably stupid of Joyce to be digging on here when she might be so comfortable at home? What does she mean by it?"

Hannah shook her head.

"I know which I should choose if I had the choice; but I think that your parents are acting very wisely."

"Do you see any sign of relenting in Joyce, then?" he asked eagerly.

"I can't say that she ever admitted as much to me," Hannah answered truthfully, "and Mrs. Hemming certainly says that she has no intention of giving up as yet, anyhow. Really, in answer to your question, Mr. Tom, I don't see what she can find in her present life to satisfy her."

"Does she do any work outside? Any of that sort of charitable work, you know, about which she was always talking? Service for humanity she used to call it," said Tom vaguely.

"Well," said Hannah blankly, "she does go out a

good deal, I think. She is a kind, sweet soul, Mr. Tom, and so unselfish; you have no idea of the hours she spends with that poor Bobbie Dane. You don't know him, of course; he is a cripple boy who lives in the settlement, and he is never able to get off his back. Perhaps you have heard her speak of his brother, Philip Dane, who is a very clever fellow, and one of our leaders—in fact, he is father's right-hand man."

"No, I don't think I have ever heard the name," said Tom, without much interest. "I am glad to hear you say that Joyce is unselfish, because, upon my word, though it seems horrible for a man to speak so of his sister, I used to think that she was awfully selfish at home, especially with my mother, you know. She might have helped in lots of things, but either she was too lazy or didn't think it good enough. Isn't it queer how people will do all sorts of things for outside people, when they grudge a little service at home?"

"Yes, it is queer," answered Hannah. "I am very hopeful that in a month or two, perhaps, Joyce will think differently, and see things in another light. If she goes home then, I don't think that your mother will have any reason to complain about her being selfish or idle. I really think myself that she is coming to it."

"Well, I am sure we shall be awfully glad. She is not in to-night, I suppose? Only, even if she were in, I must not see her, because I promised father and mother that I would not try to see her. They are going to leave her entirely alone for six months, and I expect that at the end of that time they will either come to see her or at least communicate with her."

"I think it is very brave as well as very wise of them to take that course," said Hannah, "and I am sure that, looking at it from that point of view, it is the very best they could possibly take. But don't they feel it very much?"

"Oh, yes, of course they do; there is a kind of shadow on the house, if you understand. It isn't like the place it was, and I know my mother is getting to look old. She has a kind of sad expression in her eyes which I don't like to see—upon my word I don't, and it makes me feel just a little bit bitter against Joyce, you know. I hope you understand?"

"Oh, indeed I do," answered Hannah fervently, more touched than she cared to own by the genuine feeling which the honest-hearted fellow made no effort to hide. He was not ashamed of it, and Hannah honoured him as she listened more than he dreamed. There was a moment's rather strained silence between them, which Hannah made haste to break. She felt that it was not well that they should

be silent, that there was more safety in the continuance of speech.

"What do you suppose I came here for to-night?" he asked suddenly.

"How should I tell?" she made answer, with a nearer approach to coquetry than he had ever before seen in her. "I haven't the key to your inner self."

"I am not so sure about that," he answered, quickly enough. "Well, I have come to see you, and you know what for."

She got up from the chair on which she had been sitting, and took a quick, nervous turn across the room.

"Oh, I hope you won't say any more," she said, in tones of such genuine distress that he looked at her slightly alarmed.

"But I am going to say something more," he said, with that quiet decisiveness which had characterised him when he first entered the house. "I have given myself three months, Hannah, and I have thought of jolly little else but you all that time, so I thought it was time to come and tell you so."

"Well, but think," she said, pausing at the table and leaning slightly upon it; "it is through me all this trouble and vexation have come upon your

father and mother. I must not, I dare not bring any more upon them; it would simply break their hearts, and you know it."

"No, I don't," he answered bravely. "They both like and respect you very much."

"Oh, yes," she answered quickly, "I know all about that. At a safe distance I am very well, but you know as well as I do that if they thought that you were thinking seriously of me for a moment in the way you mean, it would be quite as bad a grief to them as Joyce has been."

"I don't think so; but even granting that it would be a disappointment to them, I suppose you will allow that a man of five-and-twenty may be supposed to have some little choice in a matter like this."

She shook her head.

"I have thought about it a good deal," she owned frankly, "since that night long ago in the summer when you said a few words at parting which I couldn't forget. I know that you didn't speak those words lightly, and I have considered them well, and I was glad to think that circumstances had separated us so far that we need not be constantly meeting as we used to. It was better, at least for me."

She uttered these words, which so plainly indicated her own feelings, without the slightest

hesitation. True to her own high and loyal womanhood, she would not trifle with the most serious crisis in her life. Neither did she seek to hide from the man she loved that his words had found some echo in her heart; but she saw in a moment that she had made a mistake, for the light which sprang into Tom Wyndham's eyes and the look upon his face plainly said that, having heard such an admission from her, he would never let her go.

"Do you think," he said, with a swift, significant smile, "that when you have said so much I will let you go until you say a great deal more? I have never cared for anybody on earth but you, Hannah and I never will. Perhaps I am not a very religious fellow, but there are some things I believe in with a faith that is unassailable, and I know that you are the one that God has given to me, and as I stand here, I declare that no man or woman will take you from me."

CHAPTER XXVI.

NOT WELCOME.

"IT is unfortunate," said Hannah, in a low voice, and keeping her eyes averted from his face so that he might not see the light in them, "it is unfortunate that we should ever have met."

"I don't think so," answered Tom promptly. "The only thing that I am troubled about is whether I am good enough."

"Good enough for what?" asked Hannah, looking up at him with simple, questioning eyes.

"For you," he answered. "You see you are so different from other women, and I am only a very plain chap, not clever, you know, and that sort of thing."

Hannah did not for the moment reply. She was indeed thinking of all the men she knew, and drawing comparisons between them and this honest, true-hearted fellow who stood before her so humbly, and yet in such manly fashion, affecting nothing,

and only concerned lest he should not be worthy of her.

"I wish," she said, with a little difficult note in her voice, "that there were more like you; the world would be a happier and a better place."

Tom's face flushed at her praise, given so lightly, and meaning to him so much.

"I try to do what is right so far as I know how," he said. "I think a fellow owes it to himself to live as straight as possible; and as for my father and mother, it is easy to do my duty to them; they are so good themselves, and I owe them so much. I suppose it is that we get more sense as we grow older; at least, my feeling now is that I shall never be able to do enough for them in return for all they have done for me."

"How strange that you and Joyce should look at things so differently," said Hannah musingly. "I can't but think that yours is the right attitude."

"It is the only one possible to me, anyhow," said Tom. "Still, we are wandering away from the point again. What I want to know is when I can see your father?"

Again Hannah shook her head.

"I don't think that you could see him yet, anyhow. Have your father and mother the slightest idea of this?"

"No, they have not," answered Tom frankly. "You see I am not a chap that talks much about my own feelings, and they have been so taken up with Joyce, they haven't had much time to pay much attention to me of late. They don't trouble ~~them~~ themselves about me at any time."

"That is because you have never occasioned them any anxiety," said Hannah quickly. "I have heard your mother say so."

"Well, that is one reason why I think that they ought to be quite pleased now, and I am sure they will be when I tell them about you. I am going to tell them this very night. But I must have something definite to say to them. You will have me, won't you, Hannah?"

She could have laughed aloud at the direct simplicity of this question, but that it so touched her; it was a matter of serious moment to her, and she could have wished the outlook brighter. She was not at all hopeful that Mr. and Mrs. Wyndham would look favourably upon her, and she only realised now what it would be to her if she should have to give up Tom Wyndham.

"The way doesn't seem very clear," she said, with a sigh; "but perhaps it will come all right in the end."

"Why, of course it will," said Tom cheerfully.

"There is no reason why it should not. I shall speak to my father and mother this very night."

Then their talk became more lover-like, and the time sped on wings of gold. It was late when Tom left the house, and jumping into the first hansom, he drove rapidly home. He found that his mother had gone to bed, and his father was smoking his last evening pipe by the comfortable fire in the dining-room.

"Rather chilly out, isn't it?" said the old man, looking up as his son entered.

It never occurred to him to question Tom as to where he had been. Alfred Wyndham had the most absolute confidence in his son, and never sought to dictate to him or to restrain his outgoings and incomings in any way.

"Yes, it is a bit chilly. I came home in a hansom. I have been over Westminster Bridge way."

"Have you?" said the old man, looking up with quick interest. "Not seen Joyce, I suppose?"

"No, I didn't see Joyce, but I have been at her place. I have been to see Hannah Thrale, dad."

It was Tom's way to blurt out the whole thing in the most blunt way. The old man took his pipe from his mouth, and regarded his son steadily for a minute in silence.

"Oh," he said at length "you have been to see

Hannah Thrale, have you, and what for, may I ask?"

"I thought you would guess," observed Tom. "I daresay you can if you try."

"You don't mean to say that you are in love with her?" said Alfred Wyndham, with a somewhat dismayed look.

"I suppose I am," answered Tom, with a kind of subdued cheerfulness; "at least, I have asked her to be my wife. She has promised, though conditionally."

Wyndham laid his pipe on the mantelpiece; its flavour was gone.

"This is rather serious, Tom, and unexpected as well," he said gravely. "When did all this happen? I didn't know that you knew her so intimately. Have you been coming and going to this place at Westminster?"

"No, I have not; I have only seen her once since they left Camberwell; but I suppose these things do happen suddenly, don't they, as a rule? Anyhow, I have asked her, and if I can't have her I sha'n't have any other woman. I hope you won't throw any obstacle in the way, dad."

"Oh, no, I have no serious objection to the girl; in fact, I like her, and always have done," said Alfred Wyndham, though without cordiality. "It is the

complication with Joyce that I am thinking of. I don't suppose that your mother will ever countenance it for a moment."

Tom Wyndham sat down in a chair directly in front of his father, and looked at him with a very earnest, pleading look, which touched his father inexpressibly.

"But surely she won't visit Joyce's iniquities upon me. I don't see what objection she can possibly take to Hannah; everyone must admit that she is a perfect lady, and you know yourself that she is as far superior to the ordinary run of girls as she is to me."

"You are very humble, my boy, and I don't dislike to see it in you. An honest love always makes a man humble; but it will be a fearful disappointment to your mother."

"Why?" said Tom, shifting somewhat uneasily on his seat. "I am sure I have heard her say dozens of times how much she likes Hannah Thrale."

"Oh, yes, but at a safe and respectable distance; not as a likely wife for her son. You know as well as I do in what direction her hopes lie for you."

"Oh, yes, I know she would have liked me to marry Ursula Meynell at one time; but I told her quite plainly once that that was out of the question. I shall be very sorry, of course, if it is such a dis-

appointment; but, after all, a man may be allowed to choose his own wife. You did that, didn't you, dad?"

"Yes, I did, and I have not regretted it. Your argument is very good, Tom, and I don't see really that we can throw any serious objection in your way. But I am rather sorry things have happened so; it seems as if we were to be disappointed all round where our children are concerned. Did you hear anything about Joyce?"

"Not much, only that she is happy and contented enough. She was out at a meeting, so that I had no chance of seeing her."

"And did Miss Thrale say whether she thought Joyce was likely to come to her senses soon?"

"I think she did say that she thought she was getting a little weary of her way of life. She is not particularly happy in her present occupation; but we did not speak very much about Joyce to-night, naturally."

"No, I suppose not," answered Wyndham drily. "Well, upon my word, Tom, I feel rather upset, and I don't know how I am to tell your mother."

"Oh, I will tell her," said Tom. "I am not at all ashamed of my choice, but proud of it. She is a girl anyone might be proud of, and she has been the most devoted, dutiful daughter to her father. I am

sure her behaviour to him might be an example to Joyce, or to anybody."

"I am a good deal puzzled to understand what attraction she has found in you," said Wyndham presently; "not that I don't think that you are attractive, mind you, Tom. You are a very good-looking fellow, and a good fellow as well, but I should not have thought you were the kind of man to please a girl like Hannah Thrale. I should have thought she would have been all for one of these talking, long-haired fellows who are always preaching about ideals and such like."

Tom laughed, not ill-pleased.

"She is not like that, father, when you get to know her. She is as jolly and as sensible as possible, far more so than Joyce ever was. Poor Joyce, I felt sorry for her when I saw that great, dreary brick tenement where she lives and moves and has her being at present. I should think that in about two months the cure will be complete."

"Did you see Miss Thrale's father and speak to him?" asked Wyndham.

"No, he was ill, unfortunately, so I had no opportunity. But Hannah wished me to consult you first. She has told me quite frankly and decidedly that she will never marry me unless with your and my mother's full consent and approbation."

"Mine you have, and my blessing with it," said the old man heartily. "It matters very little to me how or where you choose your wife, so long as she is a good woman whom we can respect; but I rather fear, Tom, that your mother's approval is a very different matter, and will be extremely difficult to win."

"I hope she won't withhold it altogether," said Tom anxiously, "because Hannah is very proud. She won't enter a family where she is unwelcome. You will help me, dad, won't you? You will plead my cause with my mother if she should be as hard to win as you think?"

"I will do my best, my lad; but women are very set in their ideas. Sometimes it is extremely difficult to get them to change their point of view. I wish you had waited a little until this trouble about Joyce had blown over, which I earnestly hope it will. I earnestly hope it will," he repeated. "I am getting very anxious about her, I confess; perhaps we are pursuing the wisest course, but there are times when I doubt it."

Tom saw for the first time revealed to him the real depth and intensity of his father's feelings regarding Joyce. His face looked more careworn and more sad than he had seen it for a long time. He wished he knew how to comfort him and while he

was searching for words to express what was in his heart, his father continued :

"I sometimes think that if we had exercised a little parental authority, and insisted upon her coming home, she might have given in ; but we acted for the best. I hope it will turn out for the best. She didn't say very much about Joyce, did she ? "

"Not much ; but I don't think there is anything to worry over or alarm yourself about, father, because I am sure if there were Hannah would let us know immediately. It is not as if she were living all alone, you know, and without anybody to observe or be interested in her."

"No, that is quite right," said Wyndham, trying to be comforted. "We have felt it a good deal, Tom, more than you have any idea of. You will understand it, perhaps, when you have children of your own, and not till then. Well, good-night, my boy. God bless you. You have been a good son to me and to your mother, and if we can do anything to further your happiness at this crisis in your life, why, then, I think we ought to do it cheerfully."

Tom clasped the hand extended to him, but was unable to speak. Alfred Wyndham went up to his room, but not to sleep. He had got new material for thought, and somehow felt, he could not tell why, as if an added burden had been laid upon his shoulders.

CHAPTER XXVII.

NEAR THE UNSEEN.

OSBORNE THRALE'S illness the next day assumed a more serious turn, and the physician attending him apprehended the gravest issue. Hannah was constant and unremitting in her attendance upon him, night and day. For the moment everything was swallowed up in her fearful and consuming anxiety concerning the father she adored. Joyce came out and in of the rooms, helping where she could, as she had leisure on her hands; but she was not a success in a sick-room. She lacked that indescribable sympathetic quality which is essential to the perfect nurse, and while Hannah was then glad of her assistance in her small household affairs, she preferred to do everything for her father with her own hands. He was mostly unconscious, and suffering a good deal of uneasiness and restlessness, if not actual pain. Hannah's keen eye saw him gradually sinking and her heart was almost at the breaking point, for, bereft of her only friend on earth, she would be

desolate indeed. On the morning of the second day after Tom Wyndham's visit, she was sitting by her father, who had fallen into a light sleep, when Joyce brought a letter to her.

"That is Tom's writing, Hannah," she said significantly.

Hannah nodded, but the colour did not rise in the cheek, nor did she betray the embarrassment which might have been expected from her.

"He was here, Joyce, the night before last, and I have been expecting to hear from him," she whispered.

Joyce looked intensely surprised.

"What did he want? To see me, I suppose. Why did no one tell me? Oh, I should so like to have seen him."

"No, he came to see me," answered Hannah, in a low, quiet voice. "There is no secret about it. I may as well tell you, Joyce; he came to ask me to be his wife."

"Tom!—he asked you to be his wife!" repeated Joyce, in the most absolute wonderment. "Oh, Hannah, surely it is impossible."

"No, it is quite true," Hannah answered.

"And you, what did you say? Refused him, of course. Oh, poor Tom, I am so sorry for him."

"I don't think I refused him," answered Hannah,

with a grave, sweet smile. "I rather think I accepted him conditionally as far as I can remember, although this has driven everything out of my head."

"You accepted him!" repeated Joyce. "But why? I don't understand it."

"You don't? Why does a woman usually accept a man who asks her to marry him?"

"Well, I suppose," said Joyce, rather confusedly, "mostly because she cares something for him; but it is impossible you can care for Tom."

"Why?" asked Hannah, looking at her with large rather indignant eyes. "Why do you think it impossible that anybody should care for him?"

"Oh, I don't think it impossible that anybody could care for him; but you are so different. I should not have thought that Tom would interest you in the least; he is so ordinary."

A little curious smile played about Hannah's mouth, giving to it a strange sweetness.

"Ordinary, is he? I only wish a few more of us were ordinary in the same way, if to be ordinary is to be good."

"Do you mean to say that you—you care for him, then?" asked Joyce bluntly.

All the answer Hannah made was to place the letter she held in her hand against her lips. Then Joyce, wondering much, and on the point of tears,

she could not tell why, hurried out of the room.

Hannah laid her head down on the pillow for a moment, still keeping the letter near her lips. She was afraid to open it, she could not tell why, clinging perhaps to the uncertainty which had in it so much of hope—hope which perhaps the written words within might destroy. At length, however, she broke the seal, and these were the words she read :

"DEAREST,"—it began—"you will have expected to have heard from me yesterday, but I was waiting, hoping that I might have the best of good news to write. I spoke to my father whenever I got home, and he was—well, what he always is—good and kind and considerate, God bless him ! My mother feels it a good deal. I think it right to tell you quite frankly, because I know that nothing else will satisfy you. She did not say much, nor will she speak about it as I should like her to do, because sometimes when a thing is talked over the way is made clear. But she was not so bitter as I expected ; she really likes you, as everyone must and does. It is only the idea of the connection, and, of course, the complications arising through Joyce. I trust, my darling, that in a short time these obstacles will all be cleared away. Meanwhile, I hold you to your promise ; the words

that you spoke to me the other night have bound you to me for all time. Having heard you speak those words, I feel as if nothing could vex or trouble me very much. I shall come and see you soon; meanwhile, I respect your wish that until everything is made clear I will not come too much.—I am,

"Always your devoted

"TOM WYNDHAM."

When she had finished the letter, she sat with her hands folded on her lap, her eyes shining, her face suffused with tenderness. She felt at the moment that nothing greatly mattered, that she was even in a sense independent of the future for the time being; loving and knowing herself beloved, she was supremely content. Presently her father stirred uneasily, and, turning his head on the pillow, opened his eyes.

"Are you there, my child?"

Before he spoke she was on the alert, bending over him, reproaching herself even for her momentary forgetfulness of him.

"Do you feel better, father?" she asked, laying her cool, soft hand on his brow.

"No, I am not better," he answered, with dignity. "I am very ill, Hannah, and something tells me that this is the last struggle."

"Oh, hush!" she cried, in a voice sharp with anguish; "you must not say that. There is no reason why you should say it; you will be spared to me for many years yet. God will never be so cruel."

"It is only the leaving of you, my little one," he said, recurring to the caressing name by which he had been wont to call her in her earlier days. "Without me you will no doubt be much alone. I have sometimes, nay often, selfishly dreaded lest you should some day, for love of another, seek to leave me. I could wish, Hannah, now to leave you in another's care; it would make death easier, only a falling asleep."

She hesitated a moment, her heart beating, and her hand, which grasped the precious letter, trembled. Perhaps it would make him happier to know that there was someone whose heart's desire was to take her life into his keeping, and yet she hesitated for two reasons—because her secret was new and sweet, and also because she feared that the suddenness of the announcement might agitate the old man too much. His eyes, which were so soon to behold the unseen, were sharpened as he approached the slender veil which parts us from that we do not know. He saw something in her face which he had not before noticed there, and was quick to ask its meaning.

"Have you something to tell me, my child? Your face seems to me to shine with some inner light. If you have any joy which I can share, tell me quickly, for the time is short."

Then the girl fell down upon her knees by the side of the bed, and, laying her hot cheek on her father's cold, thin hand, told him in such words as she could command of what was in her heart. Osborne Thrale listened, wondering much, and as he noticed the unmistakable meaning in his daughter's face and voice, a deep content supplanted the restlessness in his eyes.

"I don't know him except by repute, but I am well assured that to have won your heart, my child, he must be worthy," he said, laying his hand on her head with a fond, caressing touch. "I would speak with him before the end, if he will. Surely he will permit me to look upon his face, so that I may read in his true eyes the promise of my child's future weal."

"Oh, I think he will come gladly, daddy," Hannah answered. "He wished he could have spoken to you last night; but surely you are not so weak as you say. I can't, I will not believe that you are going to leave me."

"There is something within which tells me that the summons is at hand," said Osborne Thrale, "and

but for you, as I said, I should not be sad, but glad the conflict is over, and soon I shall enter into the fuller light for which we crave."

But though he spoke with so much conviction, Hannah did not believe that the end was at hand. The physician, who had seen him in the morning, though he had taken a grave view of the case, had not left her without hope, nor did she think that he looked worse, but rather better.

"You will send for him, then, Hannah, quickly; there is no time to lose. I think perhaps I shall go to-night, or in the early morning at latest."

"Oh, father, how can you speak so calmly about leaving me? I can't, I will not believe it," she repeated, and her eyes grew dark with pain. "I can't do without you; other people have so much and so many, I have only you; surely you will ask God to spare you to me just a little longer."

Osborne Thrale shook his head.

"I am worn out, child, and to the weary rest is sweet. I have of late lost my hold very much upon the interests of this life, and have yearned more and more for the unseen. It is an astonishing thing how at eventide there should be light. Many things which have seemed dark and meaningless to me are now clear as noonday, and the faith which the sorrow and the stress of life have sometimes shaken is again

burning clear in my soul. Are you listening to me, Hannah? It is the testimony of a dying man which is falling upon your ears, and I would that you would hear and understand."

"I am listening, daddy," she answered, and in her voice there was a breaking sob.

"There are many false doctrines taught in these times, my child," said Osborne Thrale, in the solemn, earnest tones of a prophet, and it seemed as if a new and great strength had come to him. His very voice took a more jubilant note. "But there is only one true gospel, only one God who is strong to save when the last day is come. I have tried to know His mind and will, and to do them, and though I may have fallen far short, yet I am not afraid."

"Oh, you need not be, father," cried Hannah; "there are none so good as you. Look what you have done for others, spending yourself in their service all your life. Surely, if it be true that there are crowns of glory in heaven, yours will be among the brightest."

"Nay, I have done but little; a man's life-work is dwarfed before the vision of eternity, but such as it is I lay it at His feet. Promise me, Hannah, that whatever be your lot in life, whatever you may be called upon to endure, you will hold fast to the faith which I have tried to teach you, and which will

be to you a sure haven of safety from every storm."

Having said so much, he closed his eyes, as if the strength which had suddenly come to him had as suddenly gone.

"The Lord is good and of tender mercy," Hannah heard him whisper under his breath. They were the last words he spoke. That night he fell asleep.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"IT MUST BE STOPPED."

OSBORNE THRALE was universally mourned, and at his death there was a great gathering of all sorts and conditions of men. There was only one relative present besides his daughter—his cousin, Hubert Thrale, who was a Q.C., living in good style with his large family in one of the most fashionable parts of Kensington. He was a little, shrewd, clever man, with an abrupt yet not altogether unkindly manner, and he felt sincerely sorry for the desolate girl who sat beside him in the mourning carriage, and who was so utterly self-possessed, making none of the fuss which girls usually make in such sad circumstances. He said nothing at all to her as they drove to the cemetery, and it was only when they were nearing the settlement on the way home that he ventured to put a question to her.

"What do you propose to do, my dear? I think the best thing in the meantime will be for you to

come home with me to Queen's Gate. I can wait a little until you gather a few things together."

"Oh, I should not think of it, thank you," answered Hannah quietly.

"Why not? Your aunt will be quite pleased. She said as much to me before I left, and anyhow, even if she had not, I should take this upon myself. I had a great respect for your father; he was a very able and good man, although he held such curious ideas. I think you had better come."

"No, thank you, Uncle Hubert, I would rather not. I will stay here in the meantime."

"But how can you stay here? You are entirely alone; it would not be proper, suppose we take account of nothing else."

Hannah faintly smiled.

"We are not bound by such conventionalities in Westminster Bridge Road; besides, I am among friends, the only friends I have in the world. We are as one family; they will take care of me, uncle, I assure you, and you need have no anxiety about me."

"Well, but how are you going to live? There can't be anything left."

"No, there will be no money, but you forget that I have been earning my living for some time. I shall resume my teaching on Monday, and go on as before."

The Q.C. looked troubled, and yet he secretly admired the calm, self-reliant manner in which she spoke; thinking of his own daughters, and how absolutely helpless they would be if left in such a situation, his heart grew very soft towards the girl by his side, and he felt a fatherly impulse to take her in his arms.

"It is very brave of you, my dear," he said, and his voice was a little husky. "I suppose I must not press it in the meantime, but I cannot bear the idea of leaving you like this; it seems almost inhuman. It was all very well so long as you had your father and he had you; no one had any right to interfere or find any fault with your mode of life; but it is different now. You will allow your aunt and me to come and see you to-morrow, perhaps, and talk things over; I am sure you would be very happy among your cousins, and one more or less, of course, in a household like ours makes no difference."

"It is very kind of you to put it in that way," said Hannah, looking gratefully at him, and wondering at the depth of kindly feeling for which she had never hitherto given him credit. "But I doubt very much if I should be happy, or succeed in making others so. Believe me, I know what I am talking about. I am better where I am. But all the same I shall cherish a very sweet memory of your kindness to me to-

day, Uncle Hubert. It has helped me very much."

From this decision, although he brought forward a few more arguments, he did not succeed in turning her, and he was obliged to leave her in the little dreary rooms. The memory of her white, sad face haunted him all that day and spoilt his dinner.

Hannah was glad to be left alone, and to be able to shut the door and give way to the intolerable sense of loneliness which oppressed her. Her heart was aching both for the dead and for the living. She had sent a little note to Tom acquainting him of her father's sudden death; but it had elicited no response. This unlooked-for silence seemed to increase her loneliness, and accentuated her grief. She was sitting with her head in her hands, listening to the steady drip, drip of the rain upon the panes, when there came a quick, low tap to the door, which she recognised as Joyce's request to enter. Reluctant to be disturbed, and yet not liking to send her away, she unlocked the door and bade her come in.

"I knew you would be all alone here, Hannah, and I know you don't want me very much to come in," Joyce said quickly, "but I must come; we dare not leave you sitting here all by yourself, and your fire out, too. Won't you come up beside Mrs. Hemming and me for a little?"

"No, thank you, Joyce," said Hannah quickly, but not ungratefully. "I want to be alone just a little, and I don't mind the cold."

"Then would you rather I left you?" said Joyce hesitatingly, and with a wistfulness of look and tone which caused Hannah to relent.

"Perhaps I am selfish; I know I ought not to sit and brood; it can do no good. Come in, dear, and shut the door. I don't mind you, but I think that Mrs. Hemming would talk rather more than I could stand just at this moment. I think I am glad to see you; the loneliness of this place is awful."

"I knew it would be," said Joyce quickly. "Sit down, dear, and let me take off those wet boots. Now I shall light your fire, and get you a cup of tea that will revive you. Oh, Hannah, how cold you are! It makes me quite sad to see you like this." The pressing need of another roused all that was best and most helpful in Joyce Wyndham, and Hannah, looking on gratefully, was amazed at the quick energy of her movements, and the joy she seemed to take in trying to create some sense of comfort and homeliness in the desolate room. Very shortly a cheerful fire burnt in the little grate, the kettle was singing on the hob, and Joyce, whom necessity had taught, had set out the small meal which she

knew would do something towards cheering the sad heart of her friend.

"How good you are," said Hannah gratefully, as she drew her chair to the blazing fire, and held out her hands readily to the ruddy glow. "I really think, Joyce, that you are developing splendidly. I only wish your mother could see you now."

Joyce turned away her face quickly, so that the bitterness in her eyes might not be seen.

"You haven't got anything to do yet, I suppose?" said Hannah presently, when no response came. "I have been so engrossed with my own sorrow, I have been thinking too little of others, and it is time I woke up again. I hope you have been successful."

"No," answered Joyce, in that low voice which had in it the dull, hopeless ring Hannah had too often heard in the human voice. "There doesn't seem to be room anywhere in the world for me, Hannah, and I don't know what is to become of me now."

"There is always the one alternative, dear," answered Hannah quickly, "the one door open."

"It is not open," answered Joyce shortly; "it is

closed against me. They have shut me out for ever."

"Hush, Joyce," answered Hannah; "you talk of what you do not know."

"I talk of what I do know," she made answer. "They have never made the slightest effort to see me, thus showing that they have cast me off. If they had missed me even one tithe as much as you have often said they do, I should have been home by now. But I am not going to beg and pray for their charity like a beggar at their gates."

Hannah listened to these words with a troubled look. They had no uncertain sound about them, and indicated that the heart of Joyce Wyndham was still hard, and that she did not realise as yet her lack of duty, to say nothing of loving-kindness, towards her parents.

"I cannot sympathise with you to-night as you would like me to do, Joyce, although I am very sorry for you. You see my heart is all for fathers and mothers, because I feel at this moment as if there could be nothing on earth so precious."

Joyce felt rebuked, and her face softened.

"When you have drunk this tea, Hannah, I want to speak to you quite seriously. I have a great

thing to tell you. I don't know how you will receive it."

Hearing this, it was not astonishing that Hannah should drink her tea with considerable haste.

"Now I am ready. What is it you are going to do, or have done?"

"I wonder what you will say to it, Hannah? I am going to marry Philip Dane."

For a moment Hannah could not speak; she was absolutely astounded. She was not a girl who ever allowed her mind to dwell much upon lovers or marriage, and the thing which had been patent to more than one in the settlement had passed quite unnoticed by her.

"Marry Philip Dane!" she repeated. "Oh, nonsense. I don't think I understand what you are saying, Joyce."

"I thought I put it plain enough, and I thought, perhaps, you would be pleased; but it seems impossible in this world ever to please anybody. I am going to marry him sure enough, just as soon as everything can be settled."

"And why are you going to marry him?" asked Hannah. "Do you care for him in that way?"

"I don't think I do particularly. I admire him

and respect him ; he is a true man," answered Joyce. "I don't think it is in me to care passionately for anybody. I can at least make a home for him and for Bobbie. They both believe in me, more especially Bobbie."

Hannah sat up suddenly, and her face was stern and grave.

"It is wicked of you to talk like that, Joyce; and you don't know what you are doing. It is an awful thing to marry except for one thing only. It is—it must be—the worst martyrdom on earth, unless you have in your heart that love which will do or bear anything—such love as I have for your brother."

She uttered those words without the slightest hesitation. It was a moment when perfect candour might be the only thing that would save Joyce from making more awful shipwreck of her life than she had yet done.

"Love of that kind is not possible for me," said Joyce coolly. "I am not denying its existence. I only say it does not exist for me ; and I think we shall get along all right. We are going right down into the country, where we can live simply and economically. We shall be poor, but perhaps we shall be content with such things as we have."

"Perhaps," reiterated Hannah. "Joyce, it is my

duty to put a stop to this, and I am going to do it."

"How can you?" asked Joyce. "I am a free agent, and I am of age. No one can prevent my marrying the crossing-sweeper at the corner of the street, if I am so minded; and I am going to marry Philip Dane."

"Will you listen to me just for one moment, Joyce? I yield to none in my respect and esteem for Philip; he is a splendid fellow. But unless the woman who marries him also loves him, he will be more miserable than most. He is very peculiar, and it is only love which can glorify, or at least endure, such marked idiosyncrasies. Besides, there is another thing. I grant that he is one of nature's noblemen; but he has been reared differently from you, and when you come to live with him from day to day, he will jar upon you in a thousand painful ways. I must point out these things to you frankly, and I know what I am talking about. Oh, Joyce, be warned in time! Don't ruin your life and his."

"He does not think I shall ruin it," said Joyce with a triumphant note in her voice.

"No, because he is in love with you, and men like him are not sane when they are in love; but sanity will come quickly when the inevitable step is taken.

You will never be happy together, Joyce; and I must say that I think he has taken rather a mean advantage of your present circumstances."

"He didn't," cried Joyce, flaming up indignantly. "I knew he cared for me, because he told me ever so long ago, and I said I would think about it. I told him to-day that I had thought about it, and that I would marry him just as soon as he liked."

"And will you do this without consulting your parents, or telling them anything about it?" asked Hannah.

"Why should I consult them?" cried Joyce rebelliously. "They have cast me off; they don't care what becomes of me, whether I live or die."

"Then if you don't tell them, somebody else must, and I shall."

CHAPTER XXIX.

NO EASY TASK.

HANNAH sat still a long time after Joyce left her, much troubled in mind, her thoughts lifted completely, for the time being, beyond her own personal sorrow. This was a matter which wanted talking over, and she felt exceedingly anxious to know what were Mrs. Hemming's views regarding it; but it was, of course, useless seeking a private word with Mrs. Hemming so long as Joyce was in her rooms. She was surprised, however, as she was preparing to go to bed, to hear the familiar rat-tat at her door, and when she made haste to open it, Mrs. Hemming came in eagerly, and with a look of extreme concern on her face.

"My dear, Joyce has this minute gone to bed, and I felt I must come down and see you, not to try and console you, you poor dear, because I know that there is no consolation for the sorrow in your

heart to-night. I want to speak to you about Joyce. I rather think she has told you."

"Yes, she has," answered Hannah seriously. "Come in and sit down for a few minutes. I am so glad to see you. I wanted to talk to you about it, but I thought it was no use coming up, of course, as Joyce might not like it."

"Well, then, what do you think is to be done?" asked Mrs. Hemming. "Do you agree with me that it should not be allowed to go on?"

"Most certainly I do, and I am relieved to hear you speak so decidedly," answered Hannah. "It would never do; they would never be happy. I don't know of anything worse that could possibly happen."

"That is the worst of social life like this," said Mrs. Hemming, with a groan; "it is too rich in opportunities. Whom are you inclined to blame most?"

"Well, I think I rather blame Joyce," said Hannah, "because she is contemplating marrying a man she does not care a fig for. That is where the seriousness of the whole matter comes in. If she cared for him as he cares for her, there would be a chance of happiness for them; as it is, there is none."

"What are you going to do, then?" asked Mrs. Hemming quickly. "They are talking of an early marriage, special licenses, and all that sort of thing. I suppose I had better go and see Mr. and Mrs. Wyndham."

"I think," said Hannah, in a low voice, "if you don't mind, I will go. I feel myself in a measure responsible for all that has happened, although I must say I never contemplated a catastrophe like this. I shall go over to-morrow morning to Denmark Hill."

"I am very glad to be relieved of the task, I can tell you," said Mrs. Hemming. "I find Joyce bad enough. I have seldom met anyone more obstinate; and what I am afraid of is that opposition will simply act as a spur. Do you think it would be any use speaking to Philip?"

"I shouldn't like to do so," said Hannah; "besides, we could not ask the man to go back from his word. It must be stopped from Joyce's side of the house. I think the best thing would be for her father to come and take her away, forcibly or otherwise."

"That is easier said than done," said Mrs. Hemming significantly. "I am just afraid that Joyce will not listen to any reason, especially coming from

her father and mother. She is feeling a great deal more bitter against them now than she did when she left them. Of course, she resents very much having been so completely ignored, which, I am sure was the best possible treatment they could have decided upon. But that, of course, was before any such terrible complication as this arose."

"You agree with me, then, that there would not be much chance of happiness for them?" said Hannah anxiously "and that it is more out of pique than anything else that Joyce is willing to marry Philip Dane?"

"That is it," said Mrs. Hemming, with a sigh. "Dear, dear, how foolish people are when they don't know where they are well off. I hope, my dear, that you will be wise enough to eschew matrimony. I can tell you that I feel I must have been very remiss in my teaching of Joyce during the last three months. I have never failed to impress upon her, in season and out of season, that, however badly off she may be now, it is certain that in matrimony she would probably find herself worse. Apparently my words have made not the slightest impression upon her."

"One woman's experience of matrimony is absolutely valueless to another," said Hannah, with

a slight smile. "She always thinks that her own special venture will be a complete success."

"I suppose so," said Mrs. Hemming; "but it is a bit discouraging to find one's immediate pupils, as it were, acting exactly contrary to everything they have been taught. Well, I must not keep you out of bed, you poor child; you look quite worn out. Will you go and see the poor father and mother to-morrow morning, then, and tell them of this additional worry?"

"Yes, I shall go quite early in the day; and please do not say anything to Joyce about it."

Next day Hannah did not leave her own rooms until she was dressed to proceed to Denmark Hill, and therefore had no opportunity of meeting Joyce, which was exactly what she desired. It was about noon when she walked up the familiar road, past the roomy old houses standing in their spacious gardens, which were now sealed with the desolation of winter. The last storm of wind and rain had stripped every bough, and the leaves lay wet and sodden under foot, robbing the usually trim lawns of their smooth greenness. As she approached the gate of the Wyndhams' house she saw a brougham standing there, which

she recognised as belonging to Dr. Ferrars, and just within the gate she met the young doctor on the carriage-way, hastening out from his morning visit. He looked profoundly surprised to see her.

"Good-morning, Miss Thrale," he said, lifting his hat, and shaking hands with her, with a look of cordial sympathy in his eyes. "I need not say how grieved my father and I were to hear of your sad loss, and had we known, we should have been glad to have paid the last tribute of respect to one whom we esteemed so much."

At these unexpected words Hannah's eyes filled with tears, and she was for the moment unable to speak.

"Thank you," she said at length, quite simply and naturally, and Jack Ferrars was struck by a new beauty in her face—a gentle, subdued expression, which enhanced its sweetness without robbing it of its strength. "I hope no one is ill here," she said, anxious to change the subject, the wound being too new to bear much probing.

"Mrs. Wyndham is not at all well," he replied. "She has never been well, indeed, since her daughter left her; and the American trip has

not done her the good we hoped and expected. Someone ought to tell Joyce how very urgently she is required here."

"I shall tell her; I have come to speak about it this morning. Dr. Ferrars, a terrible thing has happened. I do not know whether I ought to tell you or not; but it is a relief to speak to someone. Joyce threatens, and, indeed, has promised, to marry one of the men at our settlement. A fine fellow he is, but, of course, quite unsuited to Joyce in every way. Perhaps you know, or at least have heard of, him — his name is Philip Dane."

"God forbid!" he said, with more passion than the occasion seemed to demand. "That must be prevented at any cost."

"I know it must, and that is why I am here to-day," said Hannah, in a low, dreary voice. "Oh, Dr. Ferrars, if you only knew what all this has cost me. I feel myself in a measure to blame; and yet I don't see how I could have averted it. Certainly I might have discouraged her in the early stage of our acquaintance, when she began to interest herself so much in social things; but how was I to know that they would take such a hold upon her?"

Ferrars answered nothing. There was a good deal of truth in what she said, and he felt for her; and yet there was such an awful bitterness in his heart that he could not speak the comforting words his kindlier nature prompted.

"A common fellow, is he?" he said between his set teeth. "Someone who has taken advantage of her ignorance of life, and who no doubt thinks it would be a fine thing to have a wife like her. It must be stopped, as you say, at any cost; but how?"

"It is not quite so bad as that," said Hannah. "Philip Dane is a gentleman—as we speak of nature's gentlemen, you will understand—and, I think, had Joyce seriously cared for him as he cares for her, I should not have troubled very much about it; but, as matters are, she is simply marrying him, so far as I can see, for two very slight and insufficient reasons. One is to get out of her present unemployed position; and the other—I hate to say it, but I am afraid it is true—to show her father and mother how complete is the breach she has made. She resents very much that they have taken no steps as yet to persuade her to come home. They thought they were acting for the best, and so did we all. Perhaps some stronger measures will be necessary now."

"You are going to see Mrs. Wyndham now to tell her this?" said Ferrars doubtfully.

"Yes, if you give me permission. If she is ill, as you say, perhaps it will be hurtful to her, and yet someone must be told."

"Oh, I don't think it would do her any special hurt; she is not so ill as that, and I know that you will speak judiciously. I shall make a point of coming in as I return from my rounds to see what effect your information has had upon her. I suppose that it has been easy for you to guess that this is a matter of very serious moment to me also?"

"I have thought as much during the last minute or two, Dr. Ferrars," said Hannah, and her beautiful eyes, eloquent with understanding sympathy, were uplifted to his face. "Oh, I wish with all my heart I could make matters right. It is so hard to see things going wrong, and to be unable to help. I am afraid you feel very bitter against me."

"I have felt bitter more than once," he acknowledged frankly; "but I have done you an injustice for which I beg you to forgive me." He extended his hand, and with a close clasp and another understanding look, they parted, and Hannah

went on slowly towards the house. She was so uplifted beyond all personal feeling, so completely concerned with this new development of affairs, that she did not trouble herself in the least about her own reception from the mother of the man she loved. She simply gave her name, and asked Ada to say to Mrs. Wyndham that she wished to see her on important business.

"I have just met the doctor, and he gave me permission to see Mrs. Wyndham," she said, seeing the doubtful look on the girl's face.

"Oh, then I shall tell her; but he was very particular to say that she must be kept quiet, and not to see too many people who would talk to her, miss," answered Ada. "I daresay the missus will be very glad to see you."

Hannah smiled very drearily, and sat down to wait the result of her request.

CHAPTER XXX.

TOM'S MOTHER.

"MISSUS will see you now," said Ada, coming back after a very brief absence, and Hannah silently followed her up the softly-carpeted staircase, and into the pleasant dressing-room where Mrs. Wyndham had been obliged during the last week or two to spend so much of her time. She was sitting in an easy-chair before the cheerful fire, and she waited until the maid had shut the door before she looked round or made the slightest remark. Hannah was much struck by the change in her; consuming anxiety and the heart-sickness of hope deferred had robbed her of much of the winsome comeliness which had been so becoming to her. Her face had lost its ruddy bloom and its rounded outline, and her ample morning-gown clung loosely about her figure, indicating that it was less substantial than of yore.

She pushed her chair round a little at the shut-

ting of the door, and turned her eyes full on the girl's face. She was quite at a loss to understand the motive of this visit, and naturally attributed it in some way to Tom. A little rush of pity welled in her motherly heart as she noticed the girl's deep mourning, and the stamp of grief upon her face.

"Good-morning, my dear," she said, in the gentlest tones. "I am pleased to see you. Come and sit down and tell me what you have to say."

Hannah took a step forward, and being moved by a sudden impulse, bent over the hand extended to her and kissed it. That little graceful act, so naturally performed, touched Tom's mother as nothing else could have done, and though she said nothing, she looked with increased kindliness upon the girl against whom she had lately felt a good deal of bitterness, pleased to note the striking grace of her figure, and the rare beauty of her face. After all, she would be a very presentable daughter-in-law, she thought; there was nothing common or commonplace about her.

"And what have you come to say to me, my dear?" she said, quite gently, still prepared to capitulate at any moment, and yet anxious to hear what the girl had to say.

"I am almost afraid to tell you," said Hannah frankly, "and nothing but desperation would have brought me. It is Joyce I have come about; she must be taken away."

"Taken away!" said Mrs. Wyndham, sitting up, the liveliest alarm spreading over her face. "What do you mean? What has happened to her?"

"Nothing has happened to her, fortunately, and she is quite well, only something may happen unless you and Mr. Wyndham intervene, and that in a most peremptory fashion. She has promised to marry Philip Dane."

Mrs. Wyndham grew quite white, and Hannah feared for the moment that she was about to faint. She, however, recovered herself immediately, and was alive and alert to hear the worst, and to plan what was best to be done. In a few brief words, Hannah laid the matter before her, explaining it as best she could, and as she listened a very determined look came on Mrs. Wyndham's face.

"Yes, as you say, it must be prevented. I scarcely contemplated anything quite so bad as this, although I must say I have had my doubts as to the advisability of so many of you living together in one house. Joyce's motive is quite clear

to me, since you assure me that her affections are not much, if in any way, involved."

"I am sure they are not," said Hannah promptly, "and that is what makes me feel and say that it must be stopped at any price. I am a great deal more sorry for him than for her, Mrs. Wyndham; and whatever you do, I hope you will spare him as much as possible, because he will feel everything acutely, and he worships the very ground upon which she treads."

"I am sorry for him, and it is wicked of Joyce to play with an honest man's feelings in this fashion, and merely to gratify a selfish desire for revenge, for I cannot call it by any higher name," said Mrs. Wyndham. "Prompt action will be necessary. You see that I am tied hand and foot here. Can I rely upon you to help me?"

"Yes, you can," answered Hannah. "I told Joyce last night that I would do my utmost to prevent such a marriage, and I daresay she suspects that I have come here to-day."

"Well, what I want you to do for me is to go straight down to the shop. You know where it is, I suppose, and will not require any directions from me? And tell Mr. Wyndham and Tom what you have just told me. If Mr. Wyndham likes he can

come up here first; but if he decides upon more prompt action, we need not wait for that. I shall know that all is right."

"You would like me to go now, then?" said Hannah, rising at once.

"Yes; I am very much obliged to you, my dear, for the unselfish interest you have taken in this matter. You might very well have repaid me in different coin, and I should not have felt that I had very much cause for complaint."

Again Hannah's eyes filled with tears, which seemed to come more readily than of yore. She could not help contrasting her own desolate condition with that of Joyce Wyndham, who had such a home, and such parents, and yet who would not accept the good gifts which God had lavished upon her.

"Dr. Ferrars told me of your sad loss, Miss Thrale, and I felt for you—I did indeed. I should have written—I wished to do so; but I have not allowed myself. I think you will understand it has been hard for me to have all my hopes crushed at once."

"Yes, indeed," the girl answered, with difficulty; "but I had hoped you understood that I was making a firm stand. I have even seriously thought of leaving the country if that would be any good.

I know how much you have had to bear, and how your heart has been vexed, dear Mrs. Wyndham. I will not vex it."

A pleased look came on Mrs. Wyndham's somewhat troubled face.

"Ah, but the matter is not quite in your hands, Hannah," she made answer. "There is someone else to reckon with in the background, and though Tom has not said much, I can see quite well that his decision will not be easily set aside."

Hannah was silent, not knowing how to reply to such a remark, knowing as she did its absolute truth.

"But I am not at all sure that I want it set aside," said Mrs. Wyndham presently. "The past months have taught me a good deal, and to-day my heart seems to go out to you somehow. Perhaps God has sent you to be a daughter to me in Joyce's place."

Hannah crossed the room quickly, and, kneeling by her side, looked up into her face, her own exquisite with tender feeling.

"Not to take Joyce's place," she cried. "Oh, I should not like to do that; I hope Joyce will come back soon, and be to you the daughter she ought to be. If you will take me, too, and give

me a little corner in your heart—for oh, I am so lonely, and I feel the need, more than I have ever done, of a mother's loving care."

Then Mrs. Wyndham passed her hand softly over the bright head, and stooping, kissed her as fondly as if she had been a daughter of her own.

"I will be your mother, my dear, if you will let me," and as she spoke these words a strange sense of sweetness and peace stole into her heart, and she felt that she had done well.

"I had no expectation of this," cried Hannah, when she rose by and by. "It is always the unexpected which happens, is it not? but I must not waste time. I shall go straight down to the shop now, and tell Mr. Wyndham. That is what you wish me to do, is it not?"

"Yes, tell him all you have told me, and if you see Tom," she added, "you may give him a message from me if you like."

"And what is that?" asked Hannah shyly.

"Tell him I accept the daughter he will give me, and that his choice has made me very happy."

So out of what had seemed so very evil some good arose, and Hannah Thrale left the house she had entered with such a sad heart, feeling the gloom somewhat lightened. Still she was not less

anxious about Joyce, and felt that some decisive and active step should be taken to prevent the catastrophe which might happen any day. There was no doubt at all in Hannah's mind but that it was a catastrophe. She had a singular and shrewd discrimination for her years, and Joyce's motive in agreeing to marry Philip Dane was as clear as day to her. Had Joyce been moved by a great passion which considers the sacrifice of self and selfish prospects no hardship, she would not have felt justified in interfering. It was as much of Philip Dane she thought as of Joyce, and in what she had done she knew that to a man of his deep feelings, a present disappointment, though sharp, would be easier to bear than a lifelong remorse and regret.

Hannah had never been within the great warehouse of Wyndham & Co., although she knew it well by sight. It was one of those huge emporiums to be found in every district in London, having so many departments that it seemed to have a monopoly of every branch of its trade. There were some who entirely disapproved the system of business, on the plea that it destroyed the humbler efforts of the small tradesman; but Mr. Wyndham had never been able to see it in that light, and continued his business

with honourable success, believing in the system of small profits and quick returns. When Hannah asked the shop-walker for Mr. Wyndham senior, and asked that she might see him at once, her business being important, the man, impressed by a certain quiet and commanding dignity in her manner, obeyed her without the slightest hesitation or demur, and she was immediately conducted to the principal's private room. He was very much astonished to see her, but received her kindly and courteously, and with an expression of sincere sympathy over her very recent bereavement.

"It is about Joyce I have come, Mr. Wyndham," Hannah began, without preamble. "I have just been to Overton, and had a long talk with Mrs. Wyndham. She has sent me here. She says the matter is very urgent, and indeed I think it is, and some action must be taken at once."

Then in a few brief words she explained the situation, Alfred Wyndham receiving the information with evident anxiety and alarm.

"I shall not wait even to go home and see Mrs. Wyndham," he said, rising at once. "I shall just go back with you and fetch Joyce away. I can tell her with perfect truth that her mother is seriously ill, and that she must come home at once; if that does

not do, well, then, stronger measures must be tried."

Hannah had never seen the gentle-mannered and sweet-tempered Alfred Wyndham in this determined mood, and it was a relief to her to feel that he was bent upon instant action. She waited until he had given one or two orders to his subordinates, and then followed him out to the door, where he hailed a passing hansom, and, helping her in, directed the man to drive instantly to Westminster Bridge Road.

CHAPTER XXXI.

"COME HOME!"

JOYCE had been out all the morning calling at various agencies in search of some new occupation, and had just returned weary and disheartened to the settlement in time for early dinner, when there came a loud, imperative knock at her door. When she opened it, great was her surprise and consternation to behold her father, who walked into the room without giving her greeting of any kind, and, shutting the door, turned to her with a grave, stern, yet somewhat sad look on his fine face.

"What is it, papa?" she faltered, not for the moment mistress of herself. To see him thus so unexpectedly, and to feel in her heart such a rush of yearning love towards him, disconcerted her greatly; she had hoped and believed herself to be completely estranged from them, and she wished to forget and grow cold to them, and lo, one look at her father's face was sufficient to banish all her resolves, and she

felt a mad impulse to throw herself at his feet and beg his forgiveness and love.

"I have come here this morning for two reasons, Joyce," he began, in abrupt, business-like tones, keeping down his own feelings, though they were stirred in no ordinary fashion by the sight of the great, sad change in the girl. She looked years older than when he had last seen her, and, being tired at that moment, perhaps her face wore a sadder and more pathetic look. "I have come," he repeated, "to take you back to your mother. She is very seriously ill; indeed, I have no hesitation in saying that the primary cause of her illness is your conduct. Are you prepared to come back with me now, and see her?"

"Yes, father," Joyce replied steadily. "I will come now and see her, if you and she wish it, but—"

"But what?"

"I can only come on one condition—that you will not interfere too much with my personal liberty, or seek to keep me longer than I wish to stay."

"It is a very odd position we find ourselves in to-day, my child," said Alfred Wyndham, keeping down with difficulty the strange medley of emotions which were like to overpower him. "It would appear as if

our positions were reversed—you command, I obey. You shall not be interfered with if you will come now, and undertake, for a time at least, the daughterly duty which you ought never to have neglected."

These were sharp words; Joyce winced under them, but kept calm.

"I acted as my conscience directed, father," she said quickly, "and it has not been all sunshine and ease for me; nay, I have had the hardest of it, and I think that you have shown very little interest indeed in me or in my fate. It is more than four months since I left home, and not one has taken the slightest trouble to find out my whereabouts, or to inquire whether I were dead or alive."

"We need not stop to discuss that question now, Joyce," said Alfred Wyndham quietly. "There will be plenty of time at home to go over all the pros and cons of the situation. Will you gather your things together? You cannot have very much luggage, for, if I remember rightly, you took very little away with you, and your mother has been exercised a good many times as to your personal comfort."

"I have very little, but perhaps I need not take it now. I shall be coming back here again, perhaps to-night."

"Oh, in that case you may as well leave it," observed her father tranquilly, and gave no sign that he had any intention of frustrating her return should she desire it. So Joyce, with a hasty glance round the little room where she had spent many sad hours and few glad ones, went quietly downstairs behind her father, reproaching herself because her heart beat with something which was very like joyous excitement. She tried to call up some feeling of friendly regret at leaving the place which had given her shelter, but somehow it would not come at her bidding. She was only conscious of a strong feeling of relief, not unmixed with joyous anticipation, at the prospect of returning to her old home.

"I hope mamma is not so very ill," she said, as they drove away, and her voice had a meeker note in it, indicating a softer mood.

"She is quite ill enough to make us all very anxious, and, seeing that it was out of your escapade that her trouble first arose, it is just possible that the sight of you may do a little towards getting her well."

Joyce felt the reproach keenly, but she dared not resent it, because her conscience told her that it was not unmerited.

"I am sorry, father, although you may not believe

it," she said, in a low voice, "but I did not think it mattered very much."

"What did not matter?" asked Alfred Wyndham, looking straight before him.

"Well, whether I went away or not."

"You have a very feeble conception of a parent's feelings, Joyce. Perhaps you will know better one day," he replied. "I trust that you will show some little consideration for your mother to-day, and not needlessly vex her."

At this Joyce's eyes filled. She was feeling intensely miserable, and seemed now to realise in a moment the sin as well as the folly of her conduct; and when she thought of what was in the background, and remembered that she had pledged herself to marry Philip Dane, her heart grew faint within her, for it would certainly be her mother's death-blow. Alfred Wyndham wisely made no allusion to what Hannah Thrale had told him. Joyce therefore remained in ignorance of his knowledge. As the hansom drove rapidly through the streets and presently came into the suburban quietness of Denmark Hill, a sense of unspeakable rest and satisfaction came upon Joyce. There was not the faintest regret at having been carried away so suddenly and unexpectedly from the settlement, nothing but glad-

ness at the thought that she was going home. If only she had turned to her father then and told him frankly what was passing in her heart, how happy it would have made him! But she sat sedately silent. Conversation did not flourish between them, and each was conscious of an indefinable and somewhat painful barrier between them, which contrasted strangely with the old-time confidence and happy familiarity.

"You had better wait here, Joyce," said her father when they entered the house, "while I go up and prepare your mother for seeing you. She does not know that I am bringing you home, and it is as well she should not be too suddenly shocked."

Alfred Wyndham felt a trifle guilty as he delivered this judicious speech. His real object in leaving Joyce downstairs was that he might tell his wife he thought it would be as well if she did not mention to Joyce just at present the name of Philip Dane. He found her, as he expected, a good deal distressed.

"I thought you would come up, Alfred, only it seems a good while since Hannah left. Is not this a dreadful thing which has happened?"

"It has not happened yet, Letitia," he answered cheerfully, "and we have got to do our best to

prevent it happening. I think we will manage it. I have got Joyce here."

"Here!" cried Mrs. Wyndham, with visible excitement. "Where is she?"

"Downstairs; she came away quite willingly, and we must try to keep her here, Letitia. I think a little diplomacy will be required, and I must get the doctor to help me. One thing I should like to impress upon you, and that is that you do not mention the fellow's name to her. She does not know, you see, that we suspect anything, and I have got her here solely on your account. She thinks you are a good deal worse than you really are; but, upon my word, my girl, when I look at you now I feel more anxious than I have yet been. This shock has not done you any good."

"It is just as well to know the worst, dear, is it not?" she asked, looking up into his face with gratitude and wifely trust. "I felt sure you would know exactly what to do, and how to do it. I will not be impatient or unreasonable, Alfred, but oh, I should like to see Joyce. Remember it is four months nearly, and I am her mother."

Alfred Wyndham turned suddenly away, for his eyes were dim, and he knew that he could not trust his voice.

"You shall see her, my dear; she is waiting to come up. You have been sorely tried, and I see that it has laid hold of you even more than I knew. But perhaps God has heard our prayers at last."

Joyce meanwhile sat in the familiar dining-room below with a strange, unreal feeling at her heart. She felt like a stranger or a guest, and yet, as her eyes roamed round the room with which her early, indeed her only memories, were associated, she felt, with a great rush of tenderness, that this was her home. Her eyes dwelt with affectionate interest on every homely detail, noting even one or two little changes in the arrangement of the room since last she had seen it. A great sense of her own unworthiness, a new appreciation of all the blessings with which she had been so lavishly surrounded, seemed to crush her to the dust. When she heard her father's step on the stairs she rose hurriedly, trembling from head to foot. When he entered the room he saw that she was moved, and a new hope stirred in his heart.

"Your mother is ready to see you, my dear," he said, more gently than he had wished or intended to speak. "Promise me before you go up that you will not vex or hurt her; she has had a great deal to bear, but her heart is full of love for you, as mine is,

my girl—as mine is." Had he waited a moment, Joyce must have thrown herself on his breast, but feeling self-control rapidly leaving him, he turned hastily from the room, and left Joyce to find her way as best she could upstairs. She went slowly, and with feet which hesitated on every step. She knew that before she could take her place again as the daughter of the house, which indeed seemed to her at that moment the highest good she could crave, she must try to explain all her past waywardness and beg forgiveness for it. She paused on the landing, and even sat down for a moment in the low seat which ran round all the quaint landing window. Everything seemed so unreal to her; she could not believe that she was the same Joyce who had awakened that morning in her dingy little room at the settlement, cherishing nothing but hard, bitter thoughts against this same home and its dear inmates; and lo! she had come back, and her whole heart was crying out with passionate longing to be restored to the place of which her own wayward hands had robbed her. She got up at length, and crossing the wide landing with limbs which trembled greatly, entered her mother's room through the half-open door. There was a great change on Mrs. Wyndham's face, and many who knew and loved

her were concerned because she had become so frail, and looked as if her hold on life was slender indeed.

When Joyce went within the door, and saw the sweet, kind face, lit by the gentle eyes in which dwelt the mother's heart-hunger, she forgot all her fine resolves, all the little set and eloquent speeches by which she had thought it possible to smooth the way, and with a loud cry she sped across the floor, and threw herself at her mother's knee.

"Mother, mother darling!" was all she could say—and that brokenly—again and again.

There is no bitterness in a mother's heart proof against that cry. When she saw the girl's bright head upon her knee, she forgot and forgave everything, and thought of her only as the little child God had sent to her years ago, when she had prayed that her boy might be given a little sister to save him from the loneliness of being an only child. So she clasped her close, and pressed her cheek to hers, crooning over her, as she had been wont to croon over her in her babyhood.

Then the knowledge came to Joyce—the knowledge she had gone out into the wilderness to seek—that in all the world, whatever else it may hold for us, we have only one mother. And in her heart,

above all other emotions, though there were many, welled a deep spring of thankfulness because the knowledge had not come too late.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE UNPALATABLE TRUTH.

BOBBIE DANE had had a particularly long and weary day. For the first time for weeks not a single person had come to relieve his solitude, or to sit with him a little while in order to make the time pass more quickly. At four o'clock in the afternoon he was feeling particularly discontented and out of sorts, wondering what had become of Joyce and of Hannah. It was seldom a whole day passed without one or other looking in, if only to utter a word to cheer him in his loneliness. The morning had been fine and dry, but at noon the miserable rain began to fall again in that depressing and steady manner peculiar to autumn rains. The boy, tired with his thoughts, listened to the dreary drip, drip on the panes, and began to count the minutes before his brother should return. The dull, dark days had their compensation for Bobbie, since they brought his brother home to him sometimes an hour earlier

than when the days were bright. Shortly after four Hannah's bright face peeped round the door.

"Hallo, Bobbie, all alone, and no light yet. Shall I light up for you?" she asked cheerily.

"I wish you would, and I wish you would come and sit by me for a little; it has been such a long day," said the boy dolefully. "Where have you all been all day? I have never seen a creature since I had my dinner brought to me."

"I have been out all day, Bobbie. Where do you think I have been this afternoon? Seeing my grand relations," said Hannah, as she took the matches down from the mantelpiece and lit the lamp on the table.

"Oh, have you?" asked Bobbie, with interest. "The grand lawyer relation that lives at Queen's Gate, and wears a wig?"

"The very same," answered Hannah. "What do you think? They want me to go and live with them always."

"But you aren't going, are you?"

"No, I don't think so; not in the meantime, at least. But they were very kind."

"I am very glad; it is nice when people are kind, and everybody ought to be kind to you now,

Hannah," said the boy, with a world of sympathetic meaning in his eyes. "Where is Joyce to-day? I can't think what has come to her; she always used to sit such a long time with me, and she said she should not go out to-day at all."

Hannah busied herself for a few minutes about the lamp before she answered. She was seeking for some judicious words wherewith to convey the news to Bobbie, words which should in their turn be repeated to Philip Dane.

"Joyce was called away this morning in a great hurry, Bobbie; so suddenly that she had not even time to say good-bye to any of us. Her father came and fetched her away."

"Her father?" repeated the boy, his eyes growing wide with wonder; "why, I thought she had given them all up for good, and that she belonged to us now; Philip told me so."

"Well, but you see one's father and mother have a prior claim, haven't they, Bobbie?" Hannah suggested. "And poor Mrs. Wyndham is very ill. Just think how hard it must have been to her to have no daughter all this time, and she not well at all. Don't you think it was Joyce's duty to go back?"

"Well, I suppose it was," said the boy, but there

was a little inflection in his voice, "and duty is hardly ever pleasant; Philly says so. Now I guess Joyce will come back the very moment she can get. I can't think why she didn't come to say good-bye to me. I think it was mean of her."

"Well, I rather think she was fetched in a great hurry; in fact, I know she was, Bobbie, because I saw her drive away with her father in a hansom. I daresay she will be back to see you one of these days."

"I wonder what Philly will say; I shouldn't think he will be pleased," said Bobbie significantly. "I think I will tell you a great, great secret, Hannah, because I know you don't tell things like most women do. It is true that we are going to have that little cottage in the country—Philly and me, I mean—and Joyce will be there. She is going to keep house for us; Philly says so."

"That will be very nice if it comes to pass, Bobbie," said Hannah gently; "but of course Joyce must stay with her poor mother until she is well first."

"Yes, I suppose so," said Bobbie, with a sigh. "I don't think I like it all; somehow it makes me feel bad. Do you think she will be sure to come back?"

"We can't be sure of anything in this world, dear," answered Hannah, obliged to put him off with a somewhat trite remark, because she dared not yet tell him that the prospects of Joyce's return were very faint. "I think I am a little jealous of Joyce. Do you know, Bobbie, long ago you used to like me next best to Philip, and now it is nothing but Joyce."

"Well, you see, she is so awfully good, and she knows such a lot of stories. She never tires telling them; and what I like about Joyce's stories is, that suppose she tells you the same one over and over, it is always exactly the same, so you know that it is not lies."

"I think I must try and write you a story, Bobbie. But why don't you try and write one yourself? That is a bright idea," said Hannah. "If I fetch you in a beautiful note-book with red edges and blue lines, and a nice pencil, won't you try and write a story?"

"I might," said the boy; but there was a somewhat doubtful ring in his voice. "At least, I could write down the ones Joyce has told me. How long do you think it will be before she comes back?"

"I don't know, Bobbie; her mother has been ill

for a long time, and of course she cannot get better all at once."

"No, I suppose not; but surely she will come and see us just for half an hour or so. Do you think she will soon?"

"I should think so. Now I have made up your fire nicely, and put on the kettle, and I must go and see how the fire is in Mrs. Hemming's room. Your brother will be here immediately; it will soon be five."

"He will be awfully disappointed, don't you think, when he hears that Joyce has gone away? But of course he cannot feel it so bad as I do, because he does not need to lie still and have people read to him. I do hope she won't stop away very long. If she does I shall get Philly to go and fetch her back in a hansom."

Hannah smiled at this suggestion, and made what haste she could with the little simple services she often rendered to that womanless household. She was particularly anxious to get downstairs before Philip Dane should return, not being at all sure how he would regard the action she had taken that day. She was, however, quite prepared to defend herself. She had cause to do so before the evening was over.

About seven o'clock, as she was sitting alone trying to fix her attention on a book, although her thoughts were very far astray, she heard his quick, impatient knock, which seemed to indicate very clearly his state of mind. Ordinarily the most courteous of men, Philip Dane seemed to have forgotten his usual punctiliousness, and walking straight into the little sitting-room, he confronted Hannah with a very ominous expression on his face.

"So they have taken her away?" he began at once, without the slightest greeting or preliminary of any kind. "I suppose you know all about it. What does it mean?"

"It means, I hope," answered Hannah steadily, "that she has gone home for good. It will be the best that could happen for her, and for us all."

"I suppose you mean that you would regard her marriage with me as a catastrophe?" he said, with keen bitterness. "Are you at the bottom of this, Hannah? Somehow I feel as if you were."

"Yes, I am," answered Hannah, with perfect frankness; "and I know what I am doing, too, Philip. The looker-on sees most; and I am very sure that the day will come when you as well

as Joyce will thank me for what I have done to-day."

"What did you do?" he asked, without any lightening of the gloom on his face.

"I simply went and told her father and mother, and left it to them to act. Her father came over here in the middle of the day and took her away. Oh, I assure you there was no unnecessary force used. He simply said what was perfectly true—that her mother was very seriously ill through her conduct, and that it was important that she should go home and see her at once."

"She left no message for me, then? It seems most extraordinary."

"Oh, I don't think that she regards her departure as at all final. She has left all her things in Mrs. Hemming's rooms; but I hope she won't come back. Oh, Philip, can't you see for yourself what a fearful fiasco the thing has been all along? Where has your usual clearness of vision gone?"

"You call it a fiasco because she has not succeeded, poor girl, quite so well as others, perhaps; but she herself, although a little discouraged, as is natural, has no desire to turn her back upon the friends whose fidelity she has proved. I am sure

she will come back if no undue influence is brought to bear upon her."

Hannah regarded him for the moment with a great compassion in her eyes. She felt towards him as she might have done towards a dear brother. She saw that the matter was one of the most serious moment to him, and that there could be no doubt whatever about his absolute and entire devotion to Joyce Wyndham.

"Philip," she said, and her voice, by reason of the compassion in her soul, became very gentle and sweet, "I wish you would sit down and let us talk this thing over as we have been accustomed to talk things over during the last five years. Don't you think it would be a mistake? I am sure there would be no happiness in such a marriage for you or her or anybody."

"Why not?" he asked fiercely. "If we love each other, that is the main thing."

"But do you?" asked Hannah. "I know that there is no doubt about your love; but what about Joyce?"

"It will come," he said, but she noticed that he winced under her words. "She has confessed that she feels more interested in me than in anyone else—at least, there is no one else."

"Interest is not love," said Hannah sadly. "I hate to wound you, and I only wish with all my heart that there could be some happy issue out of this affair; but truly as I love Joyce, and long as I have known her, I don't believe she is capable of an unselfish devotion which would be any fair return for what you lavish on her."

"I don't want any return," he answered, stung to the quick. "All I want is to care for and protect her, and give her a home. No doubt her parents consider themselves aggrieved, but I think that they have acted in a most selfish and heartless manner towards her."

Hannah faintly smiled, and the smile spoke volumes.

"Your wiser self, if you would allow it to speak, would admit that they have acted with great wisdom and self-restraint," she said. "But let us look at it for a moment, Philip, from the most matter-of-fact point of view. Suppose you did marry, you know what your income is. You haven't found that it has afforded you and Bobbie too many luxuries—how will it stretch to include another, and to give her anything at all like what she has been accustomed to?"

"She is not afraid," he answered. "She knows

that the life I could give her would be simple and plain, but she says it would suffice."

"She does not know what she is talking about," said Hannah sadly. "She has been brought up, as you know, in a home where there is every luxury and comfort. She knows nothing, either about the earning of money or the spending of it. I don't even suppose she could cook a potato or bake a loaf of bread if her life depended on it."

"I think you underrate her abilities," said Philip Dane drily. "She would not be the first woman who has risen to the emergency when it came. But we are far away from the point. I believe that you acted from the best motives. I haven't known you for years for nothing, Hannah; but I have only to tell you that I won't give her up until she herself tells me that she has made a mistake, and if I am left in suspense too long, I will seek her in her father's house with all the confidence which love has earned."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

CLEARING UP.

AFTER dinner that night Jack Ferrars walked round to Overton. Mrs. Wyndham was not so ill as to require an evening visit, but he was naturally curious to know what had transpired during the day, and consumed with anxiety to hear something about Joyce. There was a significant look on Ada's face when she opened the door to him, and it broadened into a smile as she returned his good-evening.

"Miss Joyce has come back, sir," she said, in a cheerful tone, which seemed to indicate that things were righting themselves in the house. There was no sort of ambiguity about the views in the kitchen regarding Miss Wyndham's escapade, and she would have been considerably astonished, and probably disgusted, could she have heard the candid remarks passed upon her behaviour.

"When did she come, Ada?" asked Ferrars, as he hung up his hat.

"In the morning. Master fetched her before lunch. I think it is all right; but she do look bad."

"That is all right," said Ferrars, and just then, hearing the voice, Mr. Wyndham appeared at the dining-room door.

"Good-evening, Jack. I suppose Ada has been telling you we have got the truant home?"

"Yes. How did you manage it?" he asked, stepping aside into the room with an eagerness he did not seek to hide.

"I simply went and fetched her. I have not said a word to her about anything, except that her mother was ill and needed her, and therefore she is upstairs now, and I think it is all right. Poor thing, you would be sorry for her if you saw her. Upon my word, I haven't the heart to reproach her, and yet what a fool she has been."

"Do you think it likely that she will stay now? Does she realise what a mistake she has made all along?"

"I think she does," said Mr. Wyndham, with a nod. "I think the sight of her mother's face did it. It is the mothers who have the power and the

whip hand of us all, if they only know how to use it."

"You will be going up, I suppose, presently?" said Ferrars. "I met Miss Thrale this morning as she was coming up here, and she told me what was in the wind. I hope it has not gone too far to be remedied?"

"Upon my word I have not spoken about it; I dare not, you know," said Alfred Wyndham, his face flushing rather painfully. "Mind you, it is not that I would object to Joyce marrying a poor man; in fact, I think it might do her a lot of good to feel the pinch just for a little; but if it is true what Hannah told me, that she does not care about him at all, and was driven to it, as it were, by the stress of circumstances, I will put my foot down, and that very strongly, if need be. But, somehow, I think the mother will manage it. We have made a little compact, Jack, not to mention the matter at all to her for a few days, anyhow, till we see how matters go."

"In that I think you are very wise," said Ferrars. "Well, I will go up now, if I may, and see Mrs. Wyndham. You can depend upon me not to betray myself in any way to Joyce. I will simply express my pleasure, of course, at seeing her here, and treat it as a matter of course."

This was the course Ferrars had mapped out for himself, but it was carried out with some difficulty; for when he saw Joyce sitting in a low basket chair before her mother's bed, the great change in her almost unmanned him. She sprang up, colouring painfully at his unexpected entrance.

"How do you do, Joyce? I am glad you have come back," he said, trying to speak as naturally as possible, and giving her hand a warm, brotherly grip, which accentuated his words. "Well, Mrs. Wyndham, I suppose I can make this my P.P.C. visit; this is better than all the medicines in the world, is not it?" He bent over the bed as he spoke, and when he saw the satisfied look on the mother's face, and the grateful expression which trembled in her eyes, his own became suddenly dim.

"Yes; I think I shall be all right now I have got my little girl back. But you must not talk about P.P.C. visits; we cannot do without you here."

"That is very flattering. I hope you have not been talking too much to your mother, Joyce. I know it is a temptation; but you must remember how weak she is. We have had a good bit of anxiety about her here."

He saw Joyce sitting in a low basket chair. [*Page* 340.

"Yes," answered Joyce, "but you see I did not know."

Her voice was very meek, and somehow Ferrars, although he had so heartily disapproved of her action, did not like to see her so subdued.

"Oh, she will be all right now you have come back," he said cheerily. "We will all perk up now. My father will be round to see you in the morning, and, if he should tease you a bit, you must not mind it."

"Tell him not to be too hard on me," she said, in a low voice. "I can't bear very much just yet."

"He sha'n't say a word to you, then, if you don't like it," he answered, all in the kindest and most matter-of-fact way.

Then he took his patient's temperature and pulse, gave the customary directions, and, giving Joyce a pleasant good-evening, took his way downstairs again. Joyce wished rather that he had not been quite so matter-of-fact. Remembering the last interview she had had with him, she would have preferred some little consciousness of it in his look and tone. He appeared very quickly to have got over any disappointment he had felt on that occasion, and she wondered why her own

heart should ache a little as she listened to his retreating footsteps. He had shown her very plainly that he had forgotten that episode, and was quite pleased to be on the footing of an ordinary acquaintance. His attitude ought to have pleased her, but it did not.

"What are you thinking of, Joyce?" asked her mother, seeing the shadow on her face.

"Nothing much, mother; only that it must be very pleasant when one is ill to have Jack coming out and in. He has such a bright and kind manner."

"You are right, my dear; he brings the sunshine with him, and leaves it behind. That is the secret of his success. You are looking very tired, Joyce. I think you ought to go to bed, dear."

"May I sleep in this room, mother?" asked Joyce, as she came to the side of the bed and laid her head down on the pillow. "Do you think father would mind just for one night? I have been away so long."

"He would not mind at all; he would only be too glad. Oh, my dear, my dear, I do think that we understand each other at last."

"Anybody can understand you, mother. You

are just love, and nothing more," said Joyce in a low voice. "It is I who am so wicked and so hard to fathom, and yet I am so shallow and selfish. I see it all now, and oh, how ashamed I am."

"Hush, dear, we will not talk about it. It is all past and gone, and you are our own dear little girl again for all time now, are you not?"

"Oh, I hope so. Do you think father will ever look at me again as he used to? I think I am a little afraid of him, and I never used to be in the old days. He looks at me so sternly."

"My darling, there is no sternness in your father's heart towards you. You nearly broke it when you left him; you will go down by and by, after Tom has gone to bed, and have a little talk with him. He is waiting, I think, till he can have you all to himself. I hope that after to-night there will be no need to say anything more."

Joyce's answer was a muffled sob, which seemed to be wrung from the very depths of her heart. She was thinking of the chain which bound her to the life she had quitted, of the vow which she had given, and which seemed to lie on her heart like lead. What would they say when they knew how far she had gone in wickedness; and how

was the crooked path ever to be made straight again?

Knowing the order and habit of the house, she found her father smoking as usual by the dining-room fire before he came up to bed. Although bidden by her mother, she entered the room somewhat hesitatingly, as if fearing that her presence might not be altogether welcome. Her father looked round at the opening of the door, and the sight warmed his heart. How he had missed her coming out and in the rooms during the past four miserable months was known only to himself.

"Has your mother gone to sleep?" he asked, and his voice had lost the hard, stern tone which had so wounded the girl's heart.

"No, father; but she wished me to come down, and I wished to come myself to talk to you. Will you let me stay in mother's room to-night?"

"Why, certainly, if you wish it, and I am glad that you do wish it, my dear," he answered. "You see for yourself, then, that she is not at all well?"

"Yes, I see," Joyce answered, and she stood by the table, with a little doubtful air, which had something pleading in it. Her attitude and look

troubled Alfred Wyndham, although it pleased him, too.

"Well, what is it you wish to say, Joyce?" he asked. "We are happy and thankful to have you here again. I trust that you may yet see it your duty to remain."

"You would allow me, then?" said Joyce, with a somewhat eager look in her eyes.

"It isn't a question of allowing," he answered, slightly nettled, he could not tell why, by her words. "You know that we did not send you away; you went of your own free will, nor have the doors of the house ever been closed against you. I think you have not treated us quite fairly, my dear."

"Oh, I know, and there is something else, a great deal more than you know of. Perhaps when you do know you will not allow me to stay. I feel that I cannot sleep in the house to-night until I have told you."

"I am ready to hear," said Alfred Wyndham, with a great gentleness, which smote the girl's sensitive heart with a new pain. It was so sweet to hear the old caressing tones of which she had been wont to think so little, and yet to fear that perhaps soon she would hear them no more.

"What I have to tell you will hurt and grieve you very much, father. I have taken a more serious step even than leaving home. I have promised to marry a man of whom you could not possibly approve. I am afraid that this will make you send me away for ever."

"I would approve of any honest man who was not ashamed to work, if you cared for him, Joyce; only he must be honest and straight, a man whom I can respect."

"Oh, he is all that," cried Joyce, an immense relief visible in her face, and yet she wondered why her heart continued to sink. "He is one of the best of men, although he wears a workman's garb and is very poor. He is noble and good."

"And you wish to marry this man?" said Alfred Wyndham slowly, and, taking his pipe from his mouth, he laid it down.

"I have promised to marry him," said Joyce, with a slight falter in her voice. "I don't know that I wish it."

"Do you care for him?" asked her father. "Do you feel that you can spend your life with him, and encounter all its vicissitudes and be happy?"

"I don't know that I do," answered Joyce. "I have made a fearful mistake, I am afraid. I have given my promise, you see."

"You say a promise, given under what circumstances?"

"Well, I was feeling depressed and miserable because I had nothing to do, and the future seemed so dark. I was glad of a little sympathy. And he—he cares so much; he said he would be content with anything I could give him."

"Poor fellow!" said Alfred Wyndham, and the expression on his face was even more eloquent than his words. "You have brought sorrow to very many hearts, Joyce, thoughtlessly. I hope that it will be a lesson to you."

"It seems useless and shallow to say that I am sorry," cried Joyce. "I feel humbled to the dust; I see now that what I thought was self-sacrifice and heroism was nothing but the purest selfishness. How can I repair all I have done? Oh, daddy, don't look at me with those sad, serious eyes, which seem to keep me so far away. Remember that I was once your little girl who used to come to you in every trouble; won't you help me now?"

Alfred Wyndham covered his eyes with his hand,

and Joyce, encouraged by his silence, took a step nearer. When he looked up at last, she threw herself sobbing on his breast.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

WHAT IT COST.

THE days passed but drearily for the inmates of the settlement in Westminster Bridge Road after Joyce had gone away. She was missed by many, for out of her own anxious sadness and perplexity had arisen a new sympathy and helpfulness towards others, which was repaid by the love and devotion of those to whom she had rendered many a little service. Most of all she was missed, perhaps, in the little upstairs room where Bobbie Dane spent so many weary hours. He lived in daily expectation of seeing Joyce come back, but there was something in the whole occurrence which mystified and perplexed as well as saddened him. Philip would not allow him to speak her name, and that in itself was at once a trial and a perplexity to Bobbie, who saw that the shadow of some great

trouble lay heavy on his brother's soul—a trouble with which Joyce had to deal; but still the boy kept his faith to her loyally, and never for a moment believed that she had actually gone away from them for ever.

He was lying all alone in the flickering firelight one afternoon, counting the minutes till Philip should come in, when someone knocked at his door. It was not a familiar knock, but rather a peremptory summons, which caused him to start up in bewildered interest.

"Come in," he called out cheerily; and then the door was opened, and a gentleman entered—a tall, stout, imposing-looking person in a frock coat, and carrying in his hand a very shiny silk hat. His hair was grey, and his ruddy face wore such a pleasant look that Bobbie beamed upon him quite cordially.

"Perhaps you want to see my brother Philip?" he said, with dignity. "He is not in; but he will be home quite soon."

"Yes, my boy, it is your brother I have come to see. You are Bobbie, I think; I have heard your name."

"Yes, I am Bobbie. Who are you? You remind me of somebody; I can't think who it is."

"My name is Wyndham."

"Oh," cried Bobbie, with a great light on his face, "are you Joyce's father?"

"Yes, I am Joyce's father."

"Why, I thought you were quite different—stern, and all that, you know."

"Indeed," said Alfred Wyndham, with a smile of interest; "suppose you tell me what you think now."

"Oh, I shouldn't like to," said the boy, with a confidential twinkle in his eye, feeling amazingly at home with his new friend. "I hope you have come to tell Philip that Joyce is coming back, because he feels it awfully. You have no idea how quiet he is; he will sit hours and hours by himself, and never say a word."

A shadow crossed the pleasant face of Alfred Wyndham. The consequences of Joyce's self-will were, perhaps, a little more serious than any of them deemed.

"I am afraid she will not be coming back just yet, anyhow," he said, unable to tell the whole truth to the boy with the poor white face, and the big, pleading eyes. "Do you think your brother will be in soon? I want very particularly to see him."

"He should be in by now; but sometimes if it is fine he walks from his work. Is it fine this afternoon?"

"Yes, clear and frosty; the air is delightful out. I suppose you do not get out very much?"

"I am never out," answered Bobbie cheerfully. "I have not been out for ever so long, not since we had a demonstration in Hyde Park one Sunday afternoon. Joyce was there—that was a day! Oh, it was splendid!"

A lump rose in Alfred Wyndham's throat. His fatherly heart yearned over the poor, helpless lad who spent his solitary hours on his back, and yet who seemed to cultivate a wonderfully bright, brave spirit to help him through.

"You are a very brave little fellow, I think," he said, "to be so contented. Many would grumble most of the time."

"Where is the good?" asked Bobbie philosophically. "It would not make me any better, and it would only vex Philip; but it will be better by and by, when we go into the country. Joyce is going with us, you know," he said, with an arch and joyful smile.

At that moment, somewhat to the relief of Alfred Wyndham, the door was briskly opened,

and someone walked in. It was natural that Wyndham should look very keenly at Philip Dane; the man who had known Joyce sufficiently well to ask her to be his wife could not but be an object of interest to him.

"My name is Wyndham," he said, with a slight bow, which Philip returned quite as slightly. The information was superfluous. Dane knew Alfred Wyndham very well indeed by sight and repute.

"Could I have a few minutes' talk with you, sir?" Wyndham said. "I have just been making the acquaintance of your brother; he is a fine little fellow. His brave, contented spirit would teach some of us a lesson."

Philip's hard, set face somewhat softened at these words, which were uttered in a genuine tone there is no mistaking.

"Yes, Bobbie is wonderfully patient," he answered. "If you will step into the next room, Mr. Wyndham, I am at your service."

He was in his working garb, his clothes stained with the dust of his daily toil; but he carried himself with a certain proud dignity which was not lost on Alfred Wyndham, and he saw that he had before him a person with whom it might be somewhat difficult to deal. Dane took a match from

his pocket and lit the gas in the little sitting-room, then turned to Alfred Wyndham with a slightly inquiring air.

"I am at your service, sir. I may say that I have been expecting to hear from Miss Wyndham for some days."

"She has wished to write, Mr. Dane, but has not known how to express herself. She does not know I am here to-day, but I thought I had better come. There are some things which are better said than written."

"That is so," said Dane politely, and waited for what was to come.

"I heard that my daughter had engaged herself to marry you, Mr. Dane, and not knowing you or any of the circumstances which led to what seemed to me an extraordinary and preposterous idea, I came at a moment's notice and fetched her away. I did not tell her that I knew anything about you; I took her home on the plea of her mother's illness, which was, however, a perfectly just and reasonable one. She was, and is still, very seriously ill indeed, through over-anxiety and worry about her daughter. You follow me?"

"I do follow you," answered Dane bravely.

"Since she came home, I am glad to say that

confidence has been restored between us as a family. Joyce has given her mother and me her entire confidence respecting all that had transpired here. All the kindness that has been shown to her in this place we shall never be able to acknowledge or repay."

At the word repay, Dane perceptibly winced, but Wyndham allowed it to pass.

"It has touched us inexpressibly; Joyce herself will never forget it, I feel sure, to her dying day. This experience, so very bitter to us, has been useful to her. My daughter has told me that in promising to marry you, she told you quite frankly that she did not care for you as a woman is supposed to care for the man whose wife she is willing to become. She is of the same mind still, but willing to fulfil her promise if you require it of her."

Dane's face darkly flushed, and Wyndham saw him involuntarily clench his hands.

"Sir," he said, looking him straight in the face, "I love your daughter as my own soul, but I would not have her sacrifice herself to me; that is not my idea of love."

Wyndham heard these words deeply moved, and he made no effort to hide his emotion. It was well, perhaps, that he did not, for Philip Dane

observed it, and it helped to soften the awful bitterness of the moment to him.

"I say to you, Philip Dane, what I said to Joyce, that if she could look me in the face and say frankly that she loved you as I loved her mother, I should be here to-day on a different errand. You are a man whom I could have welcomed as a son; but, as matters stand, I should be afraid to give Joyce to you, afraid for your sake as well as for hers. I am an older man than you, and I have seen more misery arise from loveless and ill-assorted unions than from any other cause on earth."

"Can I see Joyce?" asked Philip Dane slowly. "I think I could better take my dismissal from her lips."

"You can certainly. I should be the last man to oppose such a reasonable wish. Will you come out to my house this evening? I shall be at home after seven o'clock, and I shall see that you have speech with Joyce alone."

"I shall be there," answered Dane mechanically.

"About eight o'clock, then. I need not stay now; I have something else to do before I go home. Good-bye; I believe you understand, in a measure at least, what I feel. I am deeply sorry for you,

and it will be a lifelong regret to me that a child of mine should have inflicted so much pain on the heart of an honest man."

Then the two men clasped hands in silence, and Wyndham hurried away, strangely and deeply moved; and as he drove rapidly through the streets, his thought was all of the carelessness of youth, which takes no heed of consequences, but will have its full measure of self-will at any cost. He had given the order to the coachman to drive him to Queen's Gate, and the brougham drew up at the door of the eminent Q.C. The door was opened by a manservant in livery, who, in response to Wyndham's question, said that Miss Hannah Thrale was within, and would he step in. He was ushered into a particularly comfortable and luxuriously furnished library, where, after a few minutes, Hannah came to him. She was dressed for the evening in a gown of some soft black material, cut low enough to show the stately outlines and dazzling whiteness of her throat. Alfred Wyndham thought, as she came swiftly towards him, that she was one of the most beautiful women he had ever seen.

"How are you this afternoon, my dear?" he said, advancing to her with both hands outstretched.

"My hands are very full at present with the affairs of my daughters. I understand that I may call you my daughter, too."

Hannah's face flushed the deepest crimson, and her beautiful eyes shone.

"Dear Mr. Wyndham, did you come out all this way to say that to me? How kind of you. How are they all at Overton?"

"We shall speak of that by and by; it is of yourself I want to speak just at this moment. When is Tom to be allowed to come here? I am not at all sure that we dare to presume to be your future relatives when I find you in such a place; we had no idea that you belonged to such grand folks, Hannah."

"Oh, I don't belong to them at all," said Hannah. "Uncle is very kind, and I came here because he insisted so much upon it, and because—well, I was really glad to get away from the settlement just for a day or two. But they are too fine for me; they live in a different world. I shall be going back, I expect, on Monday."

"I have come from the settlement just now, Hannah, and I have seen and had a talk with Philip Dane."

"Oh, have you?" asked Hannah, with the most intense interest. "What do you think of him?"

"A great deal. I wish I did not think quite so much," answered Wyndham, in his blunt fashion. "I felt almost tempted as I talked with him to-day to wish that Joyce had cared about him; then there would have been something true and satisfying to redeem the whole thing from its pettiness. It has accomplished no good that I can see, but harm all round."

"Perhaps not quite," said Hannah softly. "I think perhaps it may have done Joyce a little good. Is she not more contented with her home now?"

"It is just a little early to speak," answered Wyndham. "Certainly her devotion to us, and her anxiety to atone for all the worry she has been to us, is very touching. I only hope it will last."

"And is the affair with Philip to go on?"

Wyndham shook his head.

"It cannot, my dear. I might have allowed the marriage had she loved him as he too evidently loves her; but as it is, it would be merely mad-

ness, and make shipwreck, probably, of both his life and hers."

"I think you are right," said Hannah quietly, and there was a kind of sad look on her face which Wyndham did not like to see.

"What are you thinking now?"

"Why, what I am always thinking, that I have been to blame all along. It was I who first sowed the seed of discontent in Joyce's mind. I shall never forgive myself, and I don't deserve that you should all be so kind to me."

"Hush, my dear; be kind to our boy, and that will repay us. Now I must go; I came really from my wife to tell you that she and Joyce are going off to the Riviera next week if Dr. Ferrars thinks she is able for the journey. She would like very much to see you before she goes, and so would Tom. I think he has been very patient, considering all things. Will you come on Saturday and stay over Sunday with us?"

"Yes," answered Hannah, "I shall come gladly."

"You belong to us now, you know," said the old man, thinking of her lonely and desolate condition, "and you must not keep Tom waiting too

long. I am sure your father, where he is to-day, wishes to see his child happy."

Hannah only answered with her tears.

CHAPTER XXXV.

PHILIP DANE'S FAREWELL.

BEFORE eight o'clock that night Philip Dane walked up the avenue to Overton, and rang the front door bell. He had made no special preparation in the way of dress, but wore the tweed suit which he usually substituted in the evenings for his working garb, and a soft, slouch hat well drawn over his eyes. He had left Bobbie at home, sorely exercised over the woeful change in him. The cheery whistle had not brightened the little home for many days, and the poor lad, so dependent on such little things for his daily happiness, endured many sad hours. We are all more or less selfish in our sorrow. Philip Dane was no exception to the rule. He walked up to the door of Alfred Wyndham's house as if he had some legitimate business, and when it was opened to him, he asked

for Miss Wyndham. He appeared to be expected, and was at once admitted to the drawing-room, where he was left waiting a few minutes. He glanced round the beautiful room with a keen, almost painful interest, and his brief inspection did not tend to raise his spirits. For how could one who had been reared amid such luxurious surroundings ever suffer the simple and bare existence which was all he had, or would ever have, in his power to give her? He was not more miserable at the moment than the shame-faced and hesitating girl who came reluctantly downstairs to see him for the last time. She entered softly, and he turned to her with a look of grave tenderness which was touched already by renunciation. He knew all was over before he came; he knew now that it would have been better for both had he accepted the inevitable, and remained away.

"I am very much obliged to you for allowing me to see you again, Joyce," he said, trying to speak in a calm and matter-of-fact manner. "But perhaps it was a mistake. I felt that I should like at least to bid you good-bye face to face."

Joyce came forward and stood before him in silence for a moment. She was very pale, and there was a look on her face he could not

understand, because he had never before seen it there.

"I am very much ashamed, Philip," she said at length. "Every day seems to bring home to me more proof of my own selfish folly."

"Hush; it is no use to blame yourself too much," he answered, touched by her words, but still more by her look. "It was a mistake, that was all; and it was foolish of me to think such a thing might ever be."

"Did my father give you my message?" she asked, speaking with difficulty. "I am not fit to be wife to any man, much less one so good as you; but I would still keep my promise. I—"

He interrupted her by a slight uplifting of the hand, and a faint smile, which was at once bitter and sad.

"That would be the greatest mistake of all, Joyce," he said, with a great gentleness, yet decisively. "I have only come to say good-bye, and to tell you that, though we now pass out of your life for ever, Bobbie and I will never forget you."

"Oh, I feel so small, and mean, and wretched," she cried, in a great burst of self-reproach. "I have made so many suffer, I deserve untold punishment.

If only people would not be so meek and gentle with me. Why don't you reproach me, Philip, with all my abominable selfishness?"

He passed his hand across his brow, and she saw his strong mouth quiver.

"It is not easy to reproach when one loves," he replied simply. "But there, I did not come to say such things, but simply to bid you good-bye, so I had better go."

"Oh, not yet. I want to ask you a lot of questions," cried Joyce desperately. "What are you going to do? Will you stay still in the settlement, and shall I be allowed to come sometimes and see Bobbie?"

"It will be better not," he answered firmly. "You must see for yourself it will be better that we should be as if we had never met. I am a strong man, and I can face most things, Joyce; but to meet you —believe me, it is impossible."

Joyce remained silent, awed, as she had never yet been by the subdued passion in his voice.

"Oh, will you ever forgive me?" she said brokenly at length. "I shall never forgive myself."

"There is nothing to forgive," he answered. "You did not deceive me, but were quite frank with me

from the first. Believe me, I do not blame you, nor shall I in my thoughts of you bear malice or reproach. Now we may leave this subject, painful to us both. May I say before I go how glad I am that everything is right with you here? You believe now, I think, that this is your proper sphere, which you ought never to have left."

"Yes, I do believe it," was all she could say.

"Your father said something about your going abroad. Do you go soon?"

"Next week, I believe. Hannah is going, too, and she and Tom are to be married when we return in the spring."

"I am glad to hear that. Life seems fair and happy to you all now, Joyce; and I earnestly hope your future will be bright and glad and soul-satisfying. Good-bye." He held out his hand to her, and Joyce laid hers in it a moment.

"Don't think too hardly of me, nor forget me quite, Philip," she cried brokenly, moved beyond endurance or control.

"That is a promise easily given, Joyce. It might be a happier thing for me were forgetfulness possible," and, before she could say a word in reply, he had passed out of the room. As he went through the hall, the front door was open, and Ada

admitted young Dr. Ferrars for his evening visit. As they passed, the two men looked keenly at each other. There was a peculiar searching look in Jack's eyes, for he guessed who he was and what his errand. So passed Philip Dane out of Joyce Wyndham's life for ever. In spite of his brave words, she had inflicted a scar on his heart, which time was slow to heal. Bobbie never heard the outs and ins of the story, and retained his loyal faith in Joyce, believing absolutely that she was prevented by her relatives from coming to see them as of yore. Of this belief Philip did not seek to rob him, but he never encouraged him to talk much of Joyce, or of the bright, brief time she had blessed them by her presence. To outward seeming he was quite unchanged, only he devoted himself with new enthusiasm to the cause of the brotherhood, and became a leader such as Osborne Thrale had never been, even in his best days. Also he remained unmarried till his death.

. . . . . .

The Wyndhams remained at Nice till the end of March, and then journeyed, a happy party, back to England.

When Alfred Wyndham watched Joyce on the

night of their home-coming, a great thankfulness welled in his heart. The past year had told upon the girl, and her girlhood had gone, never to come back. But in its place there was the sweet gentleness of womanhood, marked by a thoughtfulness and tender consideration for others which surprised and touched him. His wife's letters had, in a manner, prepared him for the change, yet it was more complete than he had dreamed. Sweet and lovable as was the new Joyce, there were moments that happy night when the father's heart hungered for a gleam of the old self-will; for he knew that the shadow in her sweet eyes indicated that memory had its sting. She came to him as he sat over his pipe late that night, and, slipping down on the hearthrug, laid her hand on his knee; and for several minutes there was nothing said.

"You are glad to be home again, little girl?" Wyndham said at length, not liking the strain of her long silence.

"Yes, daddy," she answered after a while, "very glad, but it has made me sad, too."

"I see that; but you must not brood, dear. No good can come of it. The past is over and done with. Let it be."

"I can't, daddy. It all comes back. I don't think I shall ever feel quite the same again."

"But, Joyce, it grieves me to hear you say that. Surely you believe that your old dad bears no malice?"

She laid her lips with lingering tenderness to the hand on which her cheek had been laid.

"I know he doesn't. God has been good, sparing mother and allowing me the chance to atone for all I made you and her suffer. But the others—oh, daddy, I can't forget. Have you ever seen Philip Dane since we left?"

"Only once, dear. I went to see him. He was a man I could wish to call my friend. He was very courteous and very kind, but—"

"But what?" she asked eagerly, with quickly coming breath.

"He showed me plainly—told me, indeed, that it would be better that there should be no comings and goings between us. His reasons were good and decisive. I was bound to respect them, Joyce."

Joyce answered nothing, but laid her head down again, and he felt her tears on his hand.

"There is something else I should like to speak of, dear," Wyndham said. "Jack has asked my permission to speak to you again."

He felt her give a little start, but could not see her face.

"What shall I say to him?"

"Tell him," said Joyce, after a long silence, "tell him that both he and I must wait."

"How long?" Wyndham asked.

"Until I have proved myself. I am not fit to be any man's wife. Besides, there is you and mother. My life's devotion would be too little."

"Hush, child. We do not ask that. To see you Jack Ferrars' wife would take the sting completely from all that has been."

Joyce rose slowly to her feet.

"I thought he had forgotten—at least, that he thought no more of me in that way."

"Men of Jack's stamp do not put off and on their love so easily," said Wyndham, with a slight smile which was reflected on Joyce's lips as she stooped to bid him good-night.

"I am not worthy," she said, under her breath, as she slipped away. Kneeling by her window, looking out upon the trees shimmering in the sweet spring moonlight, that sense of unworthiness weighed heavily upon her soul. Folding her hands on the sill, she bowed her head upon them, and prayed in broken words, which a child might have used:

"Our Father, help me to be good, for Jesus' sake."

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